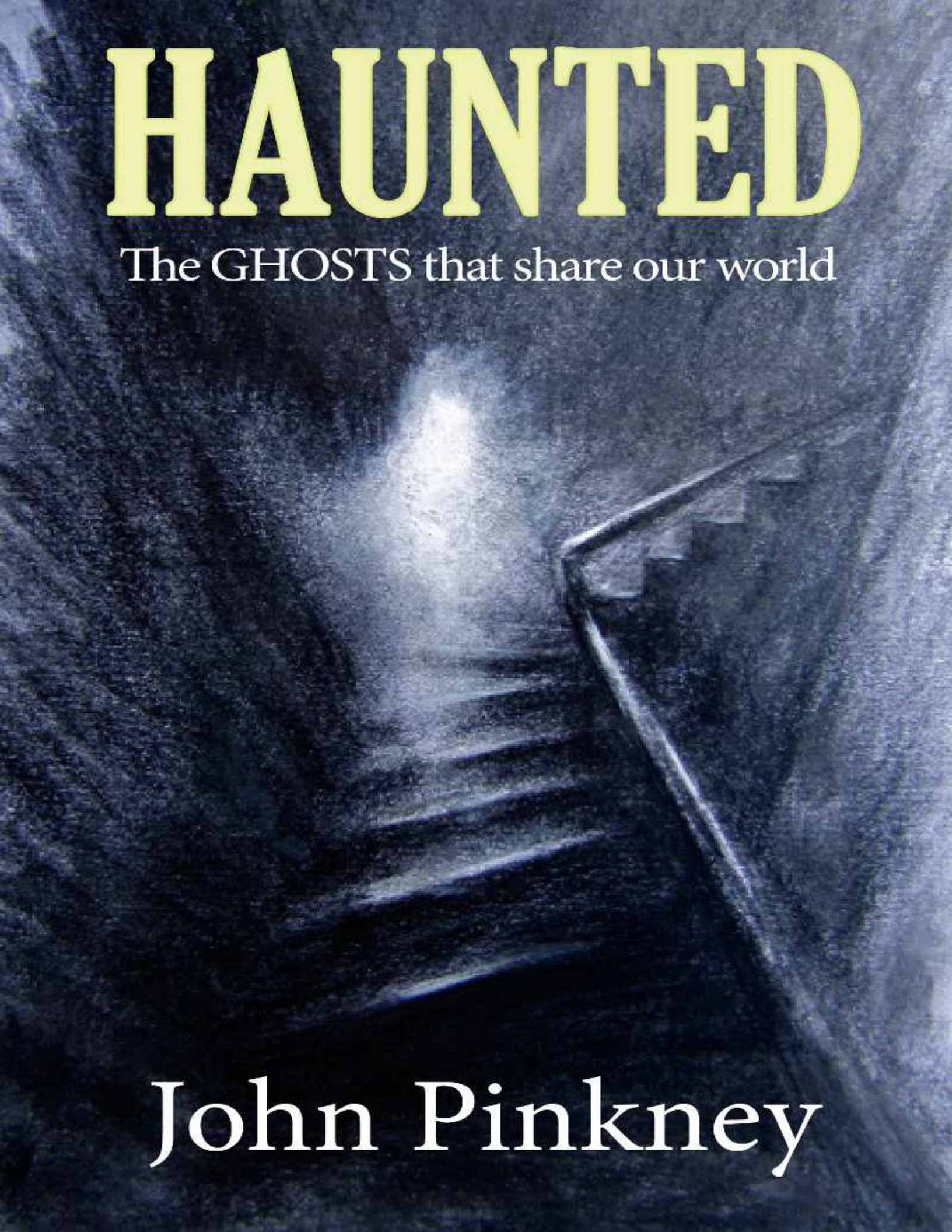
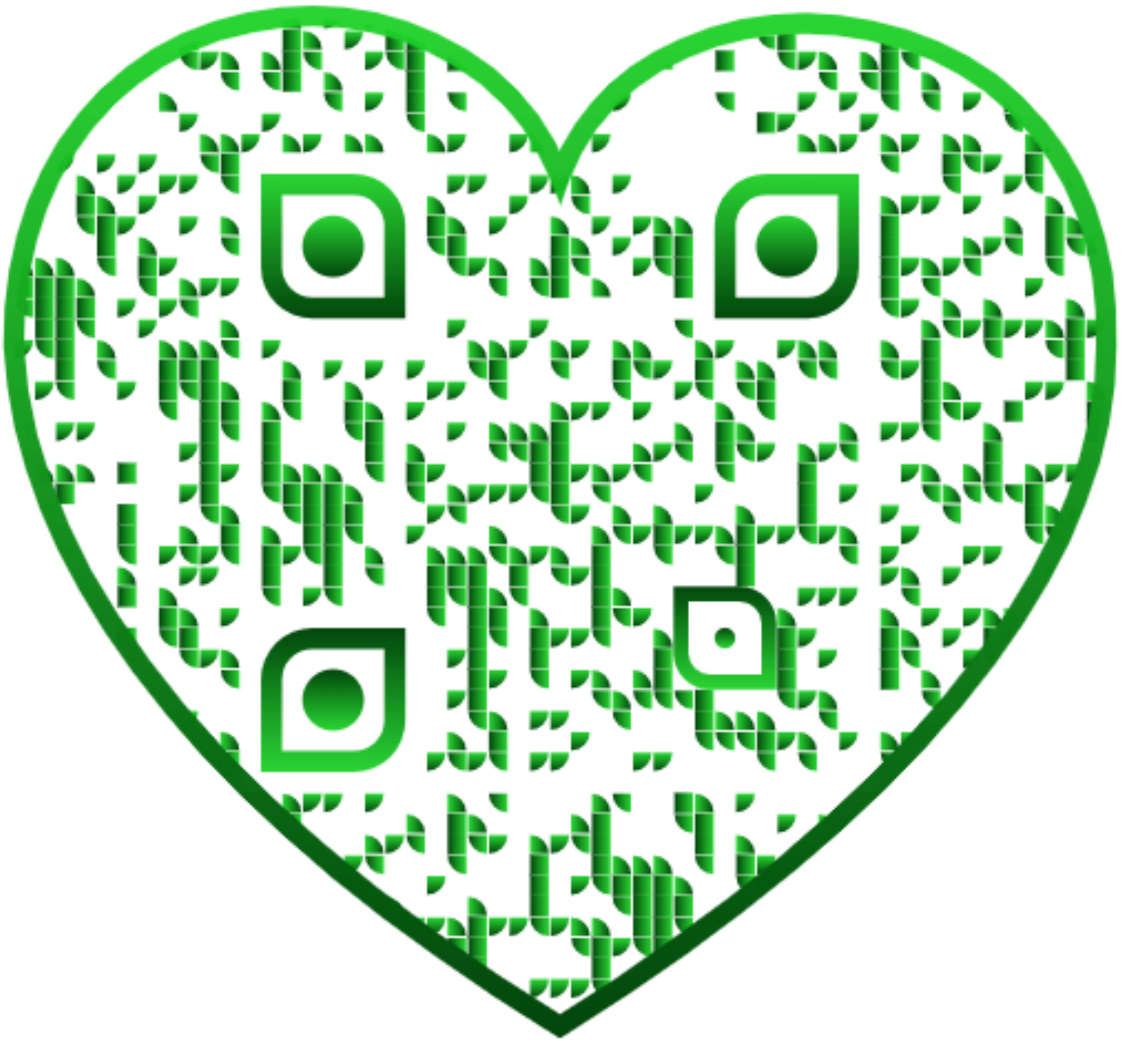

HAUNTED
The GHOSTS that share our world
John Pinkney



HAUNTED

The **GHOSTS** that share our world

John Pinkney

Cover illustration and design by Anne Spudvilas

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Preface

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'
Hamlet, act II, scene V
William Shakespeare

SEVERAL YEARS after a heart attack killed him on-air, a Melbourne newsreader returned, to haunt the studios of his radio station.

Builders who dug up an old grave on a Queensland island, to make way for a lighthouse-keeper's cottage, quickly regretted their actions. Soon after its first tenants moved in the house became an angry cauldron of poltergeist activity.

For decades a Sydney police station was troubled by the ghosts of two prisoners who had hanged themselves from trees in the grounds. Dozens of police officers reported that the phantoms' presence was signalled by sudden, painful drops in temperature.

These cases share a common characteristic. All point persuasively to the apparent existence of a universe parallel to our own: a world peopled by what successive generations have assumed are the spirits of the dead.

During my career as a journalist I have interviewed countless Australians who experienced the awe - and shock - of a first-hand encounter with a ghost. The most compelling of these eyewitness reports can be found in the following pages. Witnesses who express their belief in the reality of ghosts include an Air Force Wing Commander, a CSIRO scientist, medical staff at several hospitals, Army personnel and even the beloved Australian actress Jackie Weaver whose brilliant work brought her an Academy Award nomination. But predominant in *Haunted* are the testimonies of sincere everyday people describing in detail their bizarre encounters with the unknown.

Documentation, evidence and observers' statements should play a central role in the investigation and reportage of ghosts - and I have sought to

make them the linchpins of this book. An example is the case of the ‘asphalt apparition’ which large numbers of people claimed to have witnessed on Victoria’s Mornington Peninsula. Scores of motorists rang a radio station to report that they had seen a white floating phantom cause the notorious freeway pileup that involved 19 cars.

Here also are documented reports of haunted houses (the most notable being Monte Cristo, New South Wales - a magnet for international psychic investigators); the Brisbane City Hall clock that stopped dead for the first time ever, when its builder was buried; the ‘ghost room’ ripped from a rural church, in a desperate attempt at exorcism.

You may find that the foregoing accounts, and the other eyewitness reports in these pages, will continue to haunt you, long after you have read them.

John Pinkney

Echoes of Violent Death

Riddle of the Restless Ghost

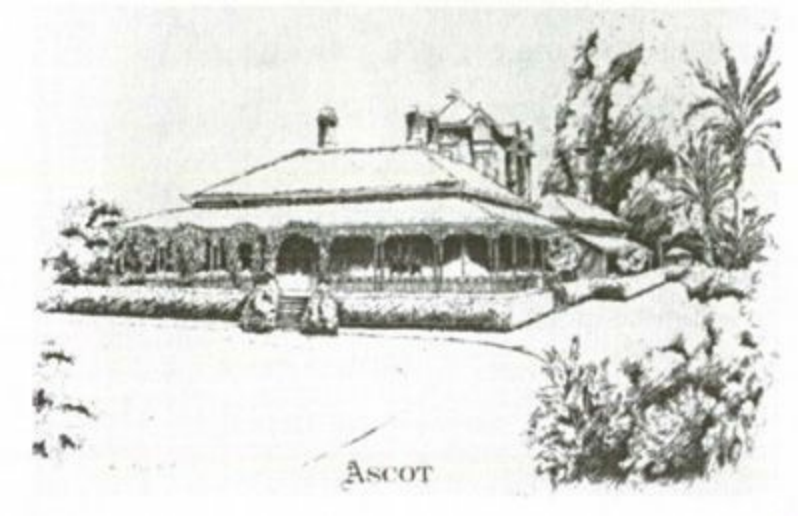
In 1984, renovator Lois Jackman bought Ascot: a sprawling multi-roomed mansion in Toowoomba, Queensland. Soon after she moved in, something within the old house stirred. Footsteps echoed in empty corridors. A wall became icy to the touch. A witness saw an apparition glowing in a doorway. Locals insisted that the 'spirit' was someone who had died hideously on the premises almost a century before. But who (on earth) had the tormented phantom been? For 20 years Lois Jackman tried to find out - sporadically trawling through yellowing newspapers, letters and police records. Not until 2004 did she learn the truth at last - discovering that her haunted house did indeed harbour a terrible secret…

LOIS JACKMAN was not known for making reckless decisions. At 46 a successful renovator - and owner of the well-patronised Brisbane restaurant Mother's - she brought copybook caution to all of her business dealings. But on the dazzling summer's afternoon that she first entered the grounds of Ascot House, her commonsense (by her own admission) temporarily deserted her.

'All I know,' she told me, 'is that from the first time I set eyes on the place it exerted an enormous magnetism. The proof of that, I suppose, is that I bought it three days later! I've long believed that I didn't buy Ascot - it bought me.'

The house, its 19th century timber and gauge-iron roofing still intact, stands in the Toowoomba suburb of Newtown. Originally named Tor, it was built in 1876 for Frederick Hurrell Holberton, wealthy owner of a local mercantile store. Holberton subsequently became an MLC (Member of the Legislative Council) in Queensland's parliament. His new home stood at the end of a broad carriageway in 13 hectares of grounds. In 1894, temporarily pressed for cash, he sold Tor at considerable profit to business owner William Beit. The new owner promptly renamed the property Ascot House, to reflect his obsession with racing. As early sketches and paintings show, the mansion, with its gothic tower, sweeping staircase and huge, high-ceilinged rooms, was an extravagant symbol of colonial wealth.

When Lois Jackman first saw the mansion 90 years later, its magnificence had dramatically faded. She stepped out of her car into a waist-high sea of weeds. A steady sell-off of land through the 20th century had reduced the size of Ascot's gardens to less than half a hectare. The paint on its original timberwork blistering, its once-proud lines ruined by gimcrack extensions, the edifice seemed almost to be shrouded in despair.



‘The house looked diabolical, but for some reason it captivated me anyway,’ Lois recalled. ‘I’d come there with a friend. She wanted to visit her brother, who was living on the property. He was in one of nine scruffy, barely livable flats that had been added during the 1940s. They were a rabbit warren, divided into 43 rooms, mainly occupied by druggies. There was rubbish everywhere - and when my friend, holding a candle, took me up into the gothic tower, we almost lost our footing on the rubble and broken plaster littering the stairs.’

Ascot was a mess. But that afternoon, seemingly against all reason, Lois made a firm decision. She would become the owner of this house - no matter what obstacles might confront her. ‘If I’d consulted an architect, or a builder or especially a financial adviser they might have talked me out of it,’ she said. ‘But the only people I wanted to discuss Ascot with were real estate agents. I went home and rang about half a dozen. None had it on their books and they all agreed it couldn’t possibly be for sale. If it had been, they’d have heard. But then I got onto someone a bit more cluey. He told me he’d check and call back. Which he promptly did - to tell me Ascot was now on his company’s for-sale listings.

‘I had a slight attack of misgivings and said I’d delay my decision till I had had one more look. Next day, I piled my three Samoyeds into the car, along with a waiter from the restaurant. I got him to look over the house, then asked him for an opinion…should I buy? He replied that he knew nothing about real estate - but why not? I signed the papers that afternoon. And I didn’t miss the coincidence, either. My restaurant was in Racecourse Road, Ascot - and here I was, buying another Ascot.’

Lois had no illusions about the vast physical and financial burden she had shouldered. Almost every physical element of the mansion, from roofs and gutters to floors and plumbing, was on the edge of ruin. The flats, with their population of drifters, had been slums for generations. She decided that every time a tenant quit, or decamped without paying the rent, she would close the flat down, in readiness for reclaiming Ascot as it had originally been designed.

Within weeks she had moved in - accepting that for the next two years at least, her environment would be dominated by the din of drills, hammers and power saws.

Soon, deep in the night, she began to hear other noises also. Noises she could not comprehend. Often, wakened by loud footsteps in the corridor, she would swing herself from bed and open the door, bracing herself to confront an intruder. Always the corridor would be empty - with the footfalls continuing to resonate. She would return to her room, sit on the bed and listen. There was *something* in the hall. But *nothing* in the hall.

One afternoon an elderly neighbour looked in to see how the renovations were proceeding. She told Lois she had lived in this street since she was a girl, more than 70 years before - and had often played with the children of Ascot's owners. The kids told her, often, that there was a ghost in the house. They had seen it. Had Lois seen anything? Lois truthfully replied that she hadn't. But privately she was increasingly disturbed by the thought that an intangible presence seemed to be sharing her private living quarters.

She had seldom, in her life, given much thought to ghosts - and had certainly not believed they existed - but now she was being forced to accept that an inexplicable phenomenon of some kind was occurring within metres of where she slept.

The haunting intensified.

'Shortly after my chat with that neighbour, I had a quite unsettling experience,' Lois told me. 'It was about 2 am and I was walking across a large empty room in which the electricians still had to install new wiring and light fittings. The room wasn't totally dark by any means. Light was spilling in from the hall, so I had no trouble navigating, especially as there were no furnishings to bump into.

'When I was about halfway, I got a shock. *Someone dragged their finger across my left shoulder*. I swung around to confront whoever it was. No one was there. Immediately I started to rationalise. I was tired. It was nerves. I'd

imagined it. Or perhaps I'd brushed against a potplant. But there were no plants in that room. My desperate attempts at denial didn't work. I had to admit to myself that something - a finger - had definitely touched me.

'A few minutes later I had to go back across that room - the geography of the house dictated it. I was jumpy and quite scared. And reasonably so, as it turned out, because at about the same spot as before, the finger made its dragging movement again…this time across the right shoulder. I didn't bother turning around - I just got out of there.'

As builders, painters and carpenters slowly restored Ascot to its former grandeur, the eerie phenomena persisted. Lois began to wonder whether the ghost might have been aroused from slumber by the noise and dust of the renovations. Her friend's brother, who had been unwittingly responsible for her first visiting the house, now revealed that he had actually seen the spirit.

'He said he'd been walking past a doorway at night when he suddenly started to shiver,' Lois recalled. 'He looked down and thought at first that light was shining from the floor. Then he saw the apparition. It was a young woman, slumped there against the wall, looking as though her neck was broken.'

Visitors and longtime neighbours offered vague, conflicting stories about who that young woman might have been. The most persuasive account, obscured though it was by generational mists of forgetfulness, was that a servant girl (possibly broken-hearted over a failed love affair) had hanged herself in her room in the early years of the 20th century. According to the elderly lady who first briefed Lois Jackman about the haunting, the girl was thought to have suicided during the residency of the second owner, William Beit.

For Lois that was detail enough. She had more practical matters to contend with and was determined, if possible, not to give too much attention to the haunting.

But then an event occurred that changed her mind.

'In the early weeks of the cleanup I'd sometimes ask young staff from the restaurant to come out to Ascot and help,' she told me. 'We'd collect bags of garbage from the tenants, move mountains of junk and generally exhaust ourselves. Rather than return the same day to Brisbane they'd then sleep overnight in an empty flat.

'On a very hot evening I was standing in one of those flats chatting with a waitress, when I absentmindedly leaned against a wall. I felt as though I'd

got an electric shock. *The surface was icy cold.* I moved my hand over the tongue-and-groove area. It was so chilled it was painful to the touch. In a 40-degree temperature, one patch of that otherwise sweltering apartment was like a freezing chamber.'

Next day Lois asked builder Alan Bond (no relation to the tycoon) to check the flat.

'Alan looked underneath - but there were no coldwater pipes, no concrete, nothing. That cold patch not only defied explanation, but the freezing temperature lasted for months.'

Never in her life had Lois Jackman felt such intense curiosity - or was it concern? She knew she would not rest until she learned the truth about the servant girl who reportedly had hanged herself in this house almost a century before. Whenever she could spare a few hours she searched bound editions of old newspapers from 1894 onward, hoping to find some reference to a housemaid's death at Ascot during the time of the second owner, William Beit.

Years passed, yielding nothing. Possibly, she surmised, the editors of the time had had scruples about publicising a suicide. Antique police records posed an even harder task, because she had been given no name for the young woman who had killed herself.

To defray the massive costs of restoring Ascot, Lois went back to what she knew best: running a restaurant and tearooms, on the premises. Customers soon learned about her struggle to establish the resident phantom's identity. The story of her research quickly spread through the district - and the word-of-mouth publicity resulted in a breakthrough.

Early in 2004 a woman rang and said: 'You've been doing your study in the wrong years. I'm related to your ghost - and I can tell you how she lived and how she died.'

Lois arranged a meeting. The woman revealed that, while preparing her family tree, she had stumbled upon the history of a tragic 23-year-old who, the records showed, had worked as a housemaid at Ascot House (then known as Tor). She had killed herself on the premises in 1891. The servant - her name was Maggie Hume - had been her grandmother's stepsister. She had not been an employee of William Beit, but of the mansion's original owner, Frederick Hurrell Holberton. And she had not hanged herself. She had taken four grains of strychnine and had died in agony.

Lois Jackman's informant produced a scrapbook confirming everything.

It contained police records, the autopsy report and contemporary newspaper articles. According to police at the time, Maggie Hume had suicided after learning that she was pregnant. Two male staff members confessed that they had had what they called ‘connection’ with her. The scrapbook even contained a photographer’s portrait of a handsome, sad-eyed Maggie Hume (see picture supplement).

After almost two decades spent fruitlessly studying the period 1894-1910, Lois felt that an immense weight had been lifted from her. But why, I asked, had she pushed herself to such limits, for so many years, to discover the identity of a stranger? ‘I couldn’t really tell you,’ she said. ‘I was impelled to trace her - that’s all I know. Much the same as when I felt I had to buy Ascot in the first place.’

There was one task still to be performed. ‘A few of us - all friends - will be buying a brass plaque inscribed with Maggie’s name and her dates of birth and death,’ Lois said.

‘Because she was a single woman who killed herself she was buried in an unmarked grave. A caretaker at Drayton Cemetery has shown us where her plot is, so we’ll know exactly where to put the plaque. It will be our way of showing her the sympathy she never received in life.’

IN TERMS OF EVIDENCE, the Ascot haunting is impressive. There are multiple witnesses, not only in the present day, but stretching back through decades to the 1890s. The identity of the person strongly presumed to ‘be’ the ghost has been established and her gravesite identified. There is even an autopsy report and a photograph of Maggie Hume.

More difficult is the question of what precisely happened at Ascot between 1984 and 2004. Had the young housemaid’s misery and pain somehow ‘recorded’ themselves in the fabric of the old building (as parapsychologists believe occurs in many hauntings)? Had the events of 1891 simply played themselves back, aurally and visually, to sensitive witnesses?

Or does Maggie Hume still *live* in the house, possibly unaware that she is dead? Alone and bewildered, did she manage, subtly, to elicit help from a kindly visitor?

To recapitulate:

‘All I know,’ Lois Jackman originally told me, *‘is that from the first time I set eyes on the place it exerted an enormous magnetism. The proof of that, I*

suppose, is that I bought it three days later! I've long believed that I didn't buy Ascot - it bought me.'

Drowned ‘Phantom’ in a Photograph

In 1923 a killer hurled a young nurse down a cliff on South Australia’s Eyre Peninsula.

Almost 40 years later - without realising it was a death scene - a holidaying Melbourne couple took snapshots of the spot. When the pictures were developed, one depicted a woman wading through rough sea.

The image was widely circulated, prompting many locals to ask if this could be the ghost of the murdered nurse. The black-and-white photograph shows a woman, fully dressed and ‘impossibly upright’, walking across wave- battered rocks near Talia Caves.

Michael Leyson of Port Lincoln, South Australia, passed the picture to me. ‘It was taken by a friend’s parents back in 1962,’ he said. ‘They swore they’d photographed nothing more than sea pounding on the rocks. But when the prints came back, there was this mist enveloping a woman, whom neither of them had seen at the time, walking through the water. My friend’s parents ruled out any theories about a double exposure and the picture has been intriguing people in this area ever since.’

I subsequently learned that the photo draws its significance from events in that precise spot in 1923. A nurse had become pregnant to a respected

married man. He was so terrified of the scandal that might engulf him that he tried to solve the problem by hurling her from the high cliffs.

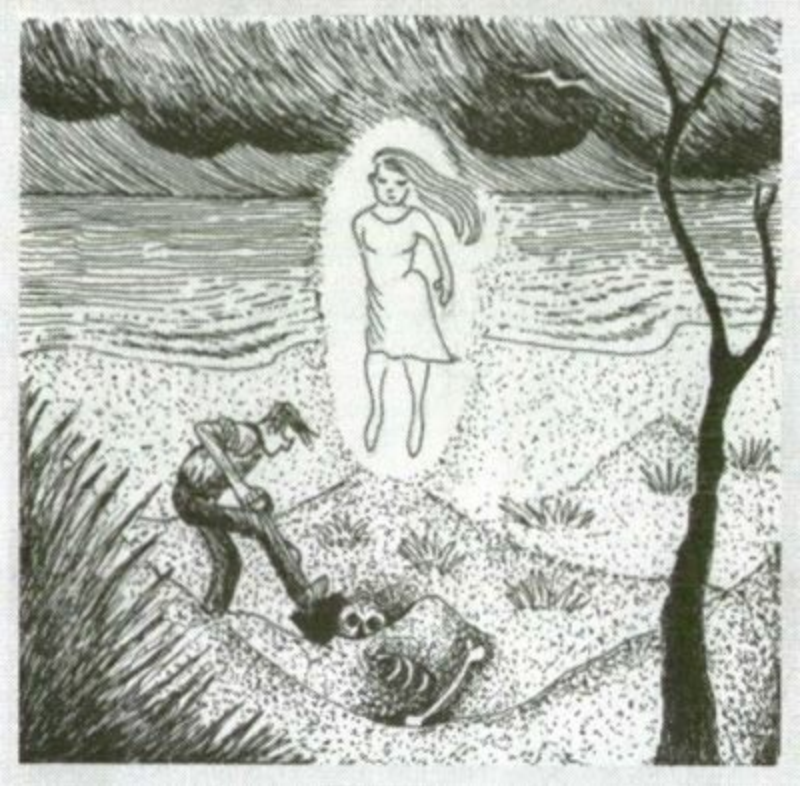
A memorial to the murdered woman stands near the cave where the purported ghost photo was taken.

The British paranormal investigator Thurston Hopkins shared the widely held view that violent death can create a type of ‘film’ or ‘recording’, which may linger for decades or even centuries. Sometimes the phenomenon can become visible - and not just to the naked eye. He wrote, ‘Most of the phantom photographs I’ve studied have been associated in some way with profound emotion or pain. It seems that a dying person’s intensity of feeling can imprint itself on the atmosphere in the form of an image, which sometimes is detected by the camera.’

The Policeman and the Pleading Spectre

A particularly poignant case of a murder that reverberated down the decades was described to me in 1991 by a senior police officer who had retired to Nowra, New South Wales.

‘If I’d reported this phenomenon officially my colleagues would have had me committed to a rubber room,’ the former detective said. ‘But as a trained observer, with 25 years’ service, I know I didn’t imagine what I saw.’



Shortly after Charles left the NSW force he set to work building a beach shack. ‘I was on my knees retrieving the drill when I heard light feminine footsteps behind me,’ he recalled. ‘I turned, thinking it was my wife with a flask of tea. But instead it was a young blonde woman in a short dress. She looked incredibly unhappy and had an intensely pleading expression on her face. She seemed so upset I opened my mouth to invite her inside. But before I could speak, she vanished like a light winking out.’

The apparition, which appeared solid and human, next manifested itself in the shack’s kitchen. ‘We both noticed a distinct coldness in the air. Again, there was that deeply anxious, begging expression on the girl’s face - and

again she vanished before I could speak. Late that afternoon, while we were walking on the beach, she approached us a third time. Before I could ask her what the problem was, and whether we could help, she melted away.

‘During the 20 years we owned that shack we didn’t see her again. But I never forgot what I came to regard as the weirdest experience of my life… especially as I had absolutely no understanding of what it meant. Then, one day, after we’d travelled across the lake to Conjola, the pieces seemed to fall into place. Human skeletons had just been found in the Nowra district - and that reminded the Conjola shopkeeper of a similar incident during World War II.

‘He said the bones of a young woman, who disappeared in 1943, had been dug up on the beach. The place where the remains were found was so close to our shack that I became convinced the image we saw was that poor girl’s ghost. I wondered whether she had been unaware that her remains had been discovered long ago, and was trying desperately to direct us to where she was buried.’

Crisis Apparitions

The Couple Who Kept Their Promise - to a Phantom

Neither Ted Leopold nor his wife Elsie had ever seen a ghost. But on the memorable night that they woke to find a white entity floating in their bedroom they knew immediately who it was. Like tens of thousands of other Australian witnesses the couple had been confronted by a 'crisis apparition': the psychic essence of a dead person, conveying a crucial message to the living…

TED LEOPOLD HAS been my friend for more than 20 years. During that time Ted, an engineer, has reminisced on several occasions about the emotionally charged night on which he and his wife saw a ghost. He has kindly agreed to write about his experience:

It happened in 1968, when my wife Elsie and I owned an old house in Canterbury, Victoria. During the period we were there, our brother-in-law Victor died of a massive heart attack: an aortal embolism. His life ended just short of his 40th birthday.

Victor had lived next door with his wife Olwen and their three young children. Everyone was stunned by his death. He'd been such an enthusiastic and likeable person - and I still remember his pleasure six months earlier when he learned he'd won a new job at Parliament House, joining the staff of the then-premier Henry Bolte.

Elsie and I attended the funeral in the morning. That night we lay in bed upstairs talking till after 12. She dropped off to sleep first. I rested there listening to the wind and the creaking of the timbers in our Victorian house.

I finally dozed off, but then wakened with a jolt. I had the overwhelming sensation that someone was in the room. My eyes were drawn to the doorway and then to the foot of the bed. Floating there was what I can only describe as a diaphanous white mist. It was about a metre long and oval in shape. It hovered, motionless. I started to shiver.

Elsie nudged me. I whispered, 'I see it.' Then we stayed silent, just watching for about 30 seconds. But in the end I knew I had to speak. I said to the apparition, 'Don't worry Vic - we'll look after her.' I was referring to his wife Olwen. I knew it was Vic floating there…knew it absolutely, in the deepest part of myself. Shortly after I spoke, the vision began to dim and then vanished.

It wasn't long before Elsie and I - back in the familiar, commonplace world again - began trying to rationalise what had happened. For the next hour we rather desperately looked for a possible explanation - proof that we'd imagined it all, or had been fooled by a streetlight or some other external source of illumination, or even by the light of the moon. But the drapes were drawn completely across the bedroom windows - and the moon by that time had moved to the other

side of the house, so it couldn't possibly have shone into our room. I even checked the drapes for a possible chink or tear - but found nothing. By this time, though, I was absolutely determined to deny my initial gut feelings and at least to reduce our experience to as classifiable a level as I possibly could. 'Well,' I asked Elsie, 'what would you call that thing, then? A spectre? A phantom?'

Elsie replied, 'I prefer to think of it as Vic's spirit.' She seemed comforted by the thought.

Everything worked out as well as it possibly could, in such tragic circumstances. Henry Bolte was incredibly kind and helpful to Olwen and the children - and Elsie and I were able to keep the promise I'd made to Vic that night.

All of this happened long ago. But I still see it as clearly as yesterday.

CRISIS APPARITIONS of the kind Ted Leopold describes are among the most commonly reported of paranormal events. Over the years I have received numerous testimonies from people who were similarly contacted by the spirits of recently deceased friends or relatives. Distance is no barrier to such visions. In the records of international psychical research organisations a common thread can often be found. Individuals on the other side of the earth may reportedly appear to family members at what is later discovered to have been the instant of death. Many parapsychologists believe that the human mind, in such cases, has somehow 'boosted its signal' - producing sounds and images which travel, 'bearing the news', across vast distances.

The sheer volume of letters I receive from people who say they were visited by loved ones at the moment of their deaths or shortly afterward leaves me in little doubt that human life persists beyond the body. Below are some typical 'crisis apparition' encounters:

Best Friend Bade a Frightening Farewell

‘In October 1987 I was living on my own in a Townsville flat,’ Allan Barra of Camp Hill, Queensland, told me. ‘At about 3.30 one morning a noise woke me. I opened my eyes and saw what looked like a man standing at the end of my bed.

‘I tried to shout, “Who’s there?” - but my lips and tongue seemed to be frozen. I couldn’t even force out a whisper. It was worse when I tried to jump out of bed and confront the intruder, whom I assumed was a burglar. I found I was totally paralysed and unable to move even a little finger.

‘In the end all I could do was lie there, terrified, and stare at the man, wondering what he’d do to me. I could see in the light from the street that he was wearing a dark blue shirt and pants: the kind of gear worn by people doing dirty work on construction sites. Although I strained to look, I couldn’t see any hands emerging from the sleeves - and the head seemed to be swallowed up in shadow. The man just stood there for at least five minutes - with me convinced all the time that my life was in danger. Then, to my astonishment, he simply disappeared - and I found I could move again.

‘For the rest of the night I lay wide awake totally mystified, wondering what had happened to me. But next day I understood. My mother came to see me at work - and to tell me that my best friend, Dave, was dead. He and his girlfriend and her two children had been travelling to Sydney. They collided head-on with a truck just outside Tamworth. Dave was burned to death. The others survived, but with multiple injuries.

‘The accident happened at 2 am - about 90 minutes before the figure appeared in my bedroom. I went to some lengths to check - and found that Dave, when removed from the wrecked car, had been wearing blue workclothes -just like the intruder which I now belatedly realised had been Dave’s spirit. I’m very pleased my friend came to see me one last time - even though it was a disturbing experience.’

Witnesses often describe sensations of being unable to move or speak in the presence of a ghost. A theory favoured by some parapsychologists is that, to make itself visible, the entity sucks energy from everything around it.

Shortly after her 15th birthday Elaine O’Reilly of Chester Hill, New South Wales, experienced a haunting which left her momentarily speechless and paralysed. ‘My maternal grandmother was in hospital with a broken hip,’

she told me. ‘One night, after visiting her in hospital, my mother and I went to bed early. At about 2 am I woke, frozen with fear. I tried to call my mother but I couldn’t make a sound, or even move.

‘Then someone familiar-looking glided over to me from a corner of my room. She placed her hand on mine and said, “It’s all right - don’t be frightened.” After that she vanished - and suddenly I had my voice back. I screamed for my mother and when she rushed in, told her what I’d seen. All she could say was “Oh, no” over and over. We both knew that Grandma was dead.

‘My mother went straight to the phone and called the hospital. They told her that Grandma had died at 2 am.’

‘Ball of Light’ Was Her Dying Brother

In 1985 a Sydney woman swore before a justice of the peace that she had watched a transparent phantom materialise in her room. She later learned that the entity had appeared at about the same time her brother had lain dying.

Mrs P. Wilder of Caringbah wrote, ‘According to my clock the incident occurred at 5.40 am. The bedroom door was closed and my blind was drawn in such a way that no outside light could penetrate it. I was awakened by a brightness in the bedroom - a luminosity so intense that I could easily read the clock face.

‘As I watched, a floating ball of light grew until it assumed the shape of a floating head and a body beneath. Through that body I could still plainly see the handles on my built-in cupboard. Curious - and surprised at myself that I wasn’t afraid - I left the bed and reached out to touch the transparent form. Immediately, its radiance faded. As soon as I sat back on the mattress the brightness intensified again, before fading a second time.

‘At that point I turned the light on. But it proved a poor substitute for the dazzling glare which moments earlier had filled the room. I went into the kitchen where the clock said 6 am. The experience had lasted 20 minutes. I carefully made notes of everything, to swear a statement before a local justice of the peace.

‘Later that day I got news that my brother had died in England.’

Among the letters I receive describing crisis apparitions, visits from relatives overwhelmingly dominate. Josephine Hogg of Moruya, New South Wales, experienced two such contacts. ‘Both were members of my family and both occurred shortly before they died.

‘The first haunting happened in 1978 when I was living in Canberra. I’d just climbed into bed and was still wide awake. Suddenly I knew with the deepest conviction that my grandfather was in the house. I couldn’t see anything, but I could hear him talking to our sons in their room - and a few seconds later, to our sleeping daughter.

‘I hurried into her room and saw my grandfather fading away into the wall. I quite deeply knew he was on his way to visit my younger brother and his family on the other side of Canberra. I returned to the bedroom and told my husband Grandpa was dying and that we’d have to visit him next day. We took off at sunrise and reached Sydney to find my grandfather in bed, very

weak and almost totally unaware of our presence. I held his hand and talked about the happy times we'd had when I was a little girl. He died soon afterward.'

Josephine received a second visitation from a dying relative in 1982. 'I was holidaying with my husband in Tasmania,' she said. 'At 3 o'clock one afternoon, when I was sitting reading a paper, my uncle Pat appeared at the end of the room. I heard him say that he hoped my husband and I would have a long and happy life together. Later I phoned home to Sydney and learned that he had died after an operation for throat cancer.'

Contacts of this kind have been chronicled across the centuries, as author Ian Wilson demonstrates in his book *Life After Death: The Evidence.* In one celebrated case a father, from his bed in Kensington, London, 'saw' an image of his son who was living at a bush camp in Australia, 17,000 kilometres distant. At around the same time, the son was confronted by the spectre of the father, floating in his tent. Sisters Alice and Mary Ellis reported these events to the pioneer psychical researcher Frederick Myers.

Alice wrote, 'On Wednesday December 29 1869 my father, who was dangerously ill, awoke from a sleep, pointed and looked most intently to one corner of the room. He said to my sister Mary and me, "Look! Don't you see? It is my poor boy Bob's head!" Then, turning to me, he said, "Normanton. Don't forget. Gulf of Carpentaria." He then sank back exhausted. This happened about 3 pm…he died next day.'

Alice added, 'When Robert returned from Australia several years later he told us that one night, while camping out, he had awoken, seeing my father's head distinctly in one part of his tent. It made such an impression on him that he went to his friend in the adjoining tent and said, "I have just seen my father. You must come and stay with me." By the next mail he received my letter telling him of our father's death. I always think they must have seen each other at the same time.'

An Uncanny Dream of Cremation

Intimations of imminent death do not always take the form of apparitions. Paranormal literature documents numerous cases in which dreams and omens have warned that a family member was about to die. A particularly compelling reminiscence of this kind was sent to me by Mrs Ann Wilson of Gosford, New South Wales:

This goes back to a time when I was living with my grandmother. She was lively and contented and apparently had nothing wrong with her. Somehow, however, I knew that a dream I had one night was directly connected with Grandma.

In the dream I stood wearing a black headscarf, looking at a wall oven. That was all. The dream seemed so trivial and meaningless I quickly forgot it.

Next morning, for no apparent reason, a large framed painting crashed down from the wall. Gran immediately said it was a sign someone was about to die. But it was she who died, several days later - and as quickly as that landscape had fallen.

Within a day or so, I began gradually to find out that my fragmentary dream had meant something after all. As I was too upset to go to a dress shop to find something to wear for the funeral, they sent out a selection for me to choose from. On top of the dresses lay a black scarf - which I had not requested.

Next day the dream's second element came true. Grandma was cremated. The surrounds of the small doorway into which the coffin slid were the same as those on the wall oven I had dreamed about.

Stopped Watch ‘Proved’ Phantom Visit

The time on a dead woman’s watch offered a Melbourne family powerful proof that her ghost had visited the house. Janet Brett of Carnegie, Victoria, told me, ‘One night in September 1978 I had a premonition that something was terribly wrong. The feeling was so powerful I couldn’t sleep.

‘Then, at 3 am, my mother (who lived in Tasmania) appeared at the end of the bed. She was wringing her hands and speaking my name. The image only persisted for a few seconds - and then she was gone. I woke my husband and said I was sure Mum was ill. He said something vaguely comforting and went back to sleep.

‘Next day we received news that she had drowned. When we went to Tasmania for the funeral the doctor told us her watch had stopped at exactly three - the time she’d appeared in our bedroom.’

A Dead Mother’s Beauty Restored

The Australian landscape artist Ruth Epps told me a moving story about her mother, who died of cancer in 1982.

‘Just a few moments after Mum breathed for the last time she returned in spirit form - as the beautiful young woman she had been 50 years before,’ Ruth said. ‘My father and I both saw this astonishing sight - and it completely changed our beliefs about the meaning of our lives.

‘We were living at that time in Esperance, Western Australia. My mother, Estelle, had been suffering from bowel cancer for six years and we knew she couldn’t last much longer. Mum had a phobia about hospitals, so it had fallen to me to nurse her at home.

‘One night, when I took a meal to her room, I was surprised to see the figure of a woman sitting by the bed. I recognised the apparition as my grandmother, who had died 18 years earlier. And I sensed that her presence could mean only one thing - my mother also was about to die.

‘The end came next day. Suddenly a beautiful young woman, bathed in radiance, ran into the room. My father whispered, “Oh, Stella!” He knew, as I did, that this glorious girl, with long brown hair tumbling down her back, was my mother as she had been half a century before. Her face was filled with happiness. Her arms were outstretched and her eyes seemed to be fixed on the far wall.

‘I was sure she could see Nan - her mother - and was running to meet her.’

I have received several similar descriptions of phantoms whose youthful appearance seemed to have been restored. Tony Miller of Paddington, New South Wales, recalled how an uncle, who had lost an arm in an industrial accident, appeared in the bedroom at the time he died. ‘My girlfriend Angie and I both saw him,’ Tony wrote. ‘He looked incredibly youthful and slim - and he had both his arms.’

Unearthly - and in Uniform

The Haunting of a Military Base

Neither Jock Smith nor his colleague Roy Leutenmayer had heard much about the long history of hauntings at the RAAF's Point Cook airfield. But their education abruptly began when, amid plummeting temperatures, a faceless phantom wearing air force uniform appeared in the workshop they were sharing. The friends became the latest of many witnesses to report phenomena that had troubled the base for more than half a century…

IN 1913 THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT paid 6,040 pounds ($8,080) for almost 300 hectares of grazing land at Point Cook on Victoria's coast. The area, frequented by seabirds and flanked by the ocean and tranquil lakes, was destined to become the nation's first military airfield and home to the emergent Royal Australian Air Force. But it would have a second claim to fame - or notoriety.

For reasons beyond comprehension Point Cook would within a few years be recognised as one of the most densely haunted airbases in the world.

The experiences of hundreds of pilots, mechanics and others employed at the complex were typified by the minor nightmare that befell Roy Leutenmayer and his friend Jock Smith. In late 1991 the men were working at a bench in the airfield's museum when the temperature fell sharply. Roy told me, 'I looked up and saw a man watching us. He had a triangular face and large ears and was wearing a dark blue uniform. Although he was only about four metres away from us and clearly visible his face was a blur. I immediately found that odd, because everything else about him was clear and distinct.

'I could see from the expression on Jock's face that he was badly shocked - and so was I. As we stood staring at him in total silence the officer - that's what he seemed to be - strolled casually across the room, walked straight through a steel filing cabinet and disappeared.'

The two men ran ashen-faced from the workshop, almost colliding with the commanding officer, Squadron Leader John Matthews. 'We told him what we'd seen and he gave us a good hearing,' said Jock. 'It was only later that we learned he and his predecessors had received similar reports in the past. The morning after that experience we discussed at great length what had happened. We were forced to a pretty strange conclusion.

'Somehow we knew who the ghost was.'

The friends began an intense search through old photographs of Point Cook personnel, going back to the earliest days of the base. Finally they came to the picture they wanted - and sat for a long time staring at it. Roy said, 'Despite our ghost's strange lack of facial features, we were in no doubt, from the distinct shape of the head in the photo, along with the shape of the ears and other characteristics that this was the person whose image we'd seen. It was Squadron Leader Stanley Gobel, who flew a Fairey seaplane

around Australia in 44 days in 1924. The moment we found that photograph we were in no doubt it was our apparition.'

Squadron Leader Gobel (assuming he was correctly identified) is only one of countless phantoms to have perplexed the personnel at Point Cook. In 2005 the RAAF's official newspaper *Air Force* published an article, 'Alone in the Dark'. Its author Private John Wellfare, seconded to Point Cook by the Australian Army, said in part:

> *…Point Cook is widely regarded as the Air Force's most haunted base. Numerous ghost stories have arisen over the years, encompassing most of the heritage buildings in the area. Some can be explained, such as the RAAF Museum's occasionally missing reference books or small items apparently being moved overnight. Other occurrences cannot be explained, such as the heater that turned on one night, despite being sealed in behind a false display wall in the museum. The staff literally had to tear down the wall to turn the heater off.*

John Wellfare describes the deserted buildings and hangars - some 90 years old - in Point Cook's heritage area, and describes his initial plan to sleep overnight in one of them.

> *…But the reaction of base personnel I spoke to changed my mind. No one laughed at me when I said I intended to write [about] the ghosts of Point Cook, and while no one was willing to go on record, they all could relate haunting experiences - either their own or a friend's - and it was hearing of staff refusing to go into buildings, day or night, that I decided to scratch the idea of a sleepover.*
>
> *…There have been some terrifying accounts, such as the recorded occurrences in the fire section. Many of the Air Force firemen who occupied [this] section on 24-hour shifts claimed to have a resident ghost in their building. Wing Commander Ken Llewellyn recorded accounts of the ghost 'rattling cups, opening doors and causing the floors to creak with his footsteps. Leading Aircraftman Nick Dennis had no experience or knowledge of the haunted fire section when he was wakened around 2 am in May 1989 by tapping on the window and the sound of someone talking.' According to LAC Dennis the voice was saying, 'Can you remember back to 1980?' As he rolled over the voice said, 'I saw your leg move.'*
>
> *Another Air Force fireman had a more terrifying experience while*

sleeping in the firehouse during the same year. 'This young man actually felt unseen hands pressing down on his legs and shoulders,' Wing Commander Llewellyn writes. 'Although powerfully built he was unable to raise himself from his bed.' This happened to the same man on three occasions, after which he refused to work on night shift.

Wing Commander Ken Llewellyn collected so many reports of RAAF-associated paranormal entities that he devoted a chapter to them in his book *Flight into the Ages* (1991):

- In 1985 a Point Cook guard accompanied by his dog on night patrol challenged a man wearing what resembled a World War I pilot's uniform. Ignoring the guard's command, and the dog's unusually ferocious barking, the intruder walked briskly past - then 'simply disappeared'.
- In 1978 a 9 Squadron helicopter crashed in South Australia, killing the commander and crew. Two days later, apparitions of the dead men were seen by a pilot at the RAAF's Amberley base, near Brisbane.
- In 1986 a phantom figure dressed in a flying suit appeared to an F111 navigator at Butterworth Base, Malaysia. Matched reports show that at the moment the entity materialised a young Mirage pilot had died off the Newcastle coast.

Point Cook is also linked to one of the most puzzling incidents in the nation's aviation history. John Wellfare writes:

Australia's first air-sea rescue flight was made from [the base]. Flying instructor Captain William Stutt and his mechanic Sergeant Abner Dalziell left Point Cook in a De Havilland 9A biplane on September 5 1920 to search for a missing schooner, Amelia J, *which had disappeared while crossing Bass Strait.*

A second plane also joined the search, piloted by Major William Anderson. [He] saw Captain Stutt's aircraft fly into a cloud and disappear. Despite extensive searches the missing aircraft and schooner were never found.

The Point Cook hauntings should be seen in context. Reports of ghosts have been made and officially chronicled at military air facilities around the world.

British airfields are particularly phantom-prone. One UK case fits within

the Australo-centric boundaries of this book. On moonlit nights at Lakenheath RAF Base the transparent image of a man in Australian pilot's uniform is often seen walking across the airfield. It is thought to be the spirit of an Australian who died when his bomber crashed in 1945.

The Ghost-Girl of Duntroon

The RAAF is not the only arm of the military to have been beset by apparitions. During the 1970s, couples living in the married quarters at Duntroon Military College repeatedly reported seeing the glowing ghost of a young woman, in clothes of the late 19th century, inspecting their furniture and belongings. Residents of one apartment complained that a bed, freshly made in the morning, would be found in a tangle an hour later, its pillows hurled around the room.

When a distressed mother said she had several times found the ghost standing by her four-month-old baby's crib, a colonel arranged an exorcism. The ceremony was temporarily successful.

The Royal Military College Duntroon was established in 1911 in a mansion built 70 years earlier for the Campbells, a family of shipping merchants. In 1885 the 29-year-old daughter Sophia Campbell died after she fell - or was pushed - from an upstairs window.

Spectre-Plagued Soldiers -

and a Scandalised Citizen

In its 6 April 1987 issue *Woman's Day* published a report by Tony Fawcett sub-headed 'Eerie voices and strange sightings…even the army avoids it at night'. The article described uncanny events in the corridors of Fortuna House, Bendigo: an 1860s mansion converted into a military HQ.

The story so infuriated an Adelaide reader that he sent the Army a withering letter of rebuke.

The magazine article read, in part:

> *…According to chilling official reports by the Army Survey Regiment, which has been stationed here for 44 years, Fortuna is indeed haunted. Formerly the home of Australia's 'Quartz King,' George Lansell, the grand ballrooms now house scientific equipment and busy army personnel. But tour the 1860s mansion and you won't find a bed. For no one sleeps here at night.*
>
> *Today at Fortuna, when soldiers talk of 'George,' they are referring to the ghost of George Lansell, who, if you believe the evidence, still regularly stalks the corridors and balconies. And then there is the female voice, supposedly that of Lansell's first wife Bedillia, who died under 'uncertain circumstances' in the 1880s. The voice, which seemingly comes from no visible body, has had tough men shaking in their army boots.*
>
> *'There have been too many incidents to dismiss it,' said the regiment's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Don Swiney, in his office which was once George Lansell's bedroom. 'In the cold hard light of day we can sit in this office and laugh about it, but I would suggest to you that at midnight perhaps you wouldn't be laughing. It's got to the stage where duty officers will no longer sleep in the main building… There was one fellow who wouldn't sleep there unless he had his dog, a Doberman, with him. And at the same time every night that dog would go berserk in a particular corner.'*

Tony Fawcett persuaded the Army to give him several of its official

records documenting the haunting.

In February 1973 a captain reported, ‘Whilst on picket duty at about 0450 hours I crossed the road in front of the new barrack block to go down the stairs leading to the path around the lake. Out of the corner of my eye…I noticed an object standing by the double doors of the kitchen…I saw an apparition, like a shroud, hovering by the door and moving slowly from side to side. The form was about 1.8 metres tall. Brickwork could be seen through it…It rotated slowly from left to right and then suddenly stopped. I got the impression it had sensed my presence…The whole sighting lasted for a couple of minutes.’

In 1982 a sergeant reported: ‘I was performing a security check of the main building…As part of my duties I was to check incoming telex messages. I checked the door to the telex room and found it to be locked as would be expected. I then proceeded to the main keyboard located in the switchboard room, and as I was removing the telex room key, I heard a woman’s voice say softly, *“What are you doing here?”* I was extremely frightened as I had carried out a full check of the doors and windows of the building and knew it to be secure. I then hurried to the telex room (a distance of some six metres). I approached the locked door and just as I was about to insert the key, the door slowly opened. I had not touched the door at this time and there were no strong draughts that could have caused the movement.’

A report written by a corporal in 1965 reads: ‘At 0300 hours I was adding logs to the open fireplace in the billiard room. Suddenly I heard the sound of footsteps approaching the double doors that connected the ballroom and the billiard room. As I turned towards the doors they both opened fully. As the building was locked and I was the only occupant, there was no logical explanation.’

Tony Fawcett concluded, ‘In the light of these reports the Army no longer requires anyone to sleep overnight in Fortuna. “No way, you’d have to be joking, not any more,” is how CO Swiney sums it up.’

The article provoked outrage in a North Adelaide man’s martial breast. On 6 July 1988 - 15 months after the story was published[*] - he fired off a letter to the Army’s public relations office at Keswick Barracks:

[*] A possible explanation for the complainant’s tardiness is that he happened upon the long-forgotten article in a dentist’s waiting room.

Dear Sir,

Please refer to the attached photocopy from Woman’s Day.

…The article claims that the Australian Army is afraid of ghosts that allegedly reside in the Fortuna mansion in Bendigo…It would be outrageous if the present-day Army permitted itself to be regulated by ghosts. If the soldiers fear phantoms, how will they measure up if they encounter a real enemy? If the Woman's Day *article is factual, then the Army's fear of ghosts ought to be a guarded secret lest some foreign country finds a way to exploit their fear.*
Please inform me whether the report is accurate. And if it is, will any action be taken?

Yours faithfully,

Almost a year later, on 1 July 1989,** Australian Army Headquarters (Fourth Military District) wrote:

** The Army's dilatoriness in responding is probably self-explanatory.

> *I have learnt from another officer on this Headquarters that you have still not received a reply on your query re a* Woman's Day *article entitled, 'The Ghosts of Fortuna Still Walk'.*
>
> *Your letter was passed to the Survey School in Bendigo for reply. As they have not yet done so, I offer the following.*
>
> *It is human nature to fear the unknown - whether it be supernatural or otherwise. Soldiers are not super human beings, they are simply average citizens trained to do a specific job. Their emotions are no different to yours and mine - and should not be expected to be. When confronting an enemy there is always an unknown element associated. Their training and task will ensure they show extreme bravery to suppress their fears and meet this enemy head-on.*
>
> *In my experience dealing with the media, I know they tend to take journalistic licence to give a story some colour. We did not perceive nor experience any adverse effects from the story and therefore took no action - it did, after all, show that soldiers are no different to anyone else in the community and that, to us, is an important message in the battle to gain community acceptance.*
>
> *The Army Survey establishment has undergone several changes at their Bendigo facilities. One of these is the relocation of Duty Staff. This is based on administrative requirements and not ghost stories. Thank you for your letter. I apologise for the delay in replying and trust this letter alleviates any concerns.*

K.D. Boehme
Major
For Commander

Televisitants

The Rapping, Tapping Entity on National TV

When Ron and Margaret Berrell rented a holiday house in the quiet lakeside town of Budgewoi, New South Wales, they little suspected that it was already occupied - by an angry spirit. So ferocious was the haunting that it forced the family to flee the cottage. Before long the Phantom of Budgewoi became the subject of a telecast that sent shockwaves through the nation's sittingrooms. It was by no means the first time, in the half-century history of Australian TV, that a ghost had publicly presented its unnerving calling card…

THE COASTAL TOWN OF BUDGEWOI is known principally for its bream-fishing - and for the violent entity whose actions created Australia-wide concern during the 1980s.

The ghost's unhappy victims were Ron and Margaret Berrell and their 14-year-old son Craig. The trio's trauma began when they moved into a holiday cottage while waiting for a new house to be built. The parents quickly learned that they had made the wrong rental choice. For weeks they were buffeted by such a devastating rampage of poltergeist activity that they packed up their possessions and quit the cottage.

Their effort was in vain. The phantom followed them.

Like most Australian families the Berrells had never been subjected to a haunting - and they were understandably shaken by the experience. Margaret, when I spoke to her, was weeping. 'We can't shake it off,' she said. 'From our first few hours in that place it took over our lives. Ornaments started flying around and there were massive bangings on the wall all the time. The racket woke the neighbours.

'We'd never thought much about hauntings, but the only conclusion we could reach was that there was a ghost in the house. And when a neighbour said an elderly man had had a heart attack there two years earlier, it confirmed our fears. For two days before they found him he'd lain rapping on the wall for help. He died in the ambulance on the way to hospital.'

The distressed family moved to a caravan park. But (as occurs in a small percentage of such disturbances) the entity moved with them. Colin Mooney, an announcer with radio station 2GO, was the first member of the media to investigate the case: 'People at the caravan park swear they saw gravel hurled around by something invisible. And inside the family's caravan itself, pillows and ashtrays were being hurled around.'

The Berrells escaped again - this time to Margaret's mother Joy Hyland. From what quickly became the new ground-zero Mrs Hyland reported, 'The moment they came through the front door the house turned into a nightmare. Crockery is flying around and smashing. It's turning on taps and slamming doors…it could kill us, that's what I'm afraid of.'

News of the destructive entity reached the Nine network's current affairs program, 'Willesee'. Producers sent a reporter and camera crew to film at the seat of the haunting, inside the Budgewoi cottage. More than one million

viewers heard the purported heart attack victim’s violent bangings and exhausted tappings.

At the request of Burrell family friends I contacted a medium who, we hoped, could exorcise the presence. The phantom thundered out its final message in the presence of the Channel 9 team. Next day the medium gently put an end to the terror and the noise.

Channel 7's 'Ghost of Honour'

In 1985 Channel 7 cameraman Geoff Stock and reporter Michael Beattie investigated a haunting at the Criterion hotel in Rockhampton, Queensland. Geoff's camera captured a fog-shrouded face which days later would stare stonily into hundreds of thousands of Australian homes.

'We were sceptical when the story was assigned to us,' Michael told me. 'None of us had the faintest expectation we'd capture anything paranormal on tape. I began by speaking to the publican Mark Gill and the former bar manager Peter Hudson who said he'd seen the apparition of a 19th century woman with hair in a bun walking the hotel's corridors. For us, the shock came on our second day there. We were setting up wide shots in an upstairs room when Geoff suddenly exclaimed, "You'll never believe what I can see."

'I peered with him through the Betacam's viewfinder - *and saw a glowing orange object, shaped like a human face, floating in the corner.*

'The thing had been invisible to my naked eye and our first thought was that it must be a flare caused by misplaced light. But Peter Hudson demolished that theory when he passed his hand through the object. It remained static, just like a hologram.'

The baffled crew took the tape back to BTQ7 Brisbane, where technicians minutely examined it. They concluded that the glow was unarguably shaped like a woman's head, prompting the cameraman and reporter to concede that they might have seen a ghost. 'It's a bit bloody strange,' Michael Beattie remarked. 'The technicians told us that flares are normally composed of straight lines or dots. They've never been known to take the shape of a human head.'

Michael Beattie saw his first phantom when he was 15. 'I was attending a boys' school in Buckinghamshire,' he recalled. 'One afternoon a friend and I walked through the woods to visit a nearby girls' school, which occupied an old mansion. On the way we heard hooves thundering. We stepped back into the bushes and watched an antique carriage, drawn by two horses, pounding past. The carriage, which we took to be real, clattered onto an old bridge - then, to our amazement, simply vanished. Later we learned that that bridge had once been the main entrance to the house.'

- In TV's pioneering days a spirit reputedly haunted Channel 7 Brisbane's

transmitting tower on Mount Coottha. Newsreader Nev Roberts told the *Courier Mail* that he remembered a technician, white-faced and trembling, coming into the studio in the 1970s to say he had seen a phantom figure dressed in overalls walking on the tower. The apparition was thought to be that of a workman who fell to his death when the tower was being built.

Chilling Case of the Killer and the Crucifix

‘The Mike Walsh Show’ is still remembered as one of Australian TV’s most successful programs. But equally strong, in the minds of many who worked for the production, is the time it was touched by the cold breath of the paranormal. The events that set the television community talking centred on one of Mike Walsh’s production assistants, whom Channel 9 management asked me to identify only as ‘Meg’.

At the station’s Willoughby studios Meg described to me how numerous witnesses had seen the image of a black crucifix appear on her ballgown - a sign which proved to be an omen of attempted murder. She said:

‘Shortly after I joined Mike’s staff I was invited to a dance. As a surprise my mother bought me a very expensive white gown. I was thrilled with the present - and all the family gathered round to admire it. But then, only a few minutes before my escort arrived, I was shattered to find something I hadn’t noticed before.

‘The gown had a black mark on it, just above the waistline. We thought at first it was a drop of ink on the material. But when we looked closer we were stunned to see it was a perfect image of a crucifix. Mum and I and my sisters were very puzzled. We worked hard with spot remover, but we couldn’t get the image off.

‘Anyway, the dance was a great success - until about 11 that night, when I excused myself to go to the toilet. The bulb in the passage had apparently burned out and there was a man lurking in the half-darkness. It later turned out that he was an ex-mental hospital inmate.

‘He leaped out of the shadows and stabbed me over and over with a knife. I screamed, people came running and he managed to get away. The knife had torn into me so deeply that I was in hospital close to death for several weeks. But what rocked me and my whole family was that crucifix.

‘The place where it appeared on the dress was exactly the spot where the man had repeatedly stabbed me.

‘I’m not religious. I’ve never worked out how that crucifix appeared or what it meant. But I can only think that something, somewhere was protecting me against harm…that my time to die had not yet come, and that the mark appeared there to save me.’

Wraiths that Haunt Radio

Ambushed - by a Dead Broadcaster

On a mild spring night in 1982, announcer David Mann arrived at 3AW's *studios in Melbourne to prepare for his midnight shift. While he was strolling down a brightly lit corridor in the largely deserted building, something happened that shook him to the core of his being. The event gave Mann his first inkling that a presence occupied the premises…*

YOUNG DAVID MANN HAD always been a radio enthusiast. The highlight of his job at 3AW was to present Saturday's midnight-to-dawn session: a show he prepared meticulously. By the end of each week the top drawer of his office desk would reliably be crammed with scrawled jokes, oddities from the press and interview questions for anyone prepared to go on-air rather than to a party or to bed.

In March 2005 I sat with David, now 3AW's marketing manager, as he recalled the unexpected episode that one night preceded his program. It was an event that made him question his beliefs about the nature of the universe.

'Back in those days 3AW was still in its old La Trobe Street building. When I arrived on that Saturday night it was just after 11. The only other people on the premises were the duty announcer, a couple of technicians and a security man. Everything was pretty quiet.

'I went up to the office area first, to get material I'd written for the show. As I approached my office I noticed a kind of mist coming from an alcove right at the end of the corridor. It looked at first as if someone was operating an extinguisher and my immediate thought was, "Oh no - there's a fire and they're trying to put it out." But I quickly realised there was no extinguisher and no fire.

'The alcove was empty except for that mist. I saw now it was in a vague shape - the shape of a man, quite plump. Obviously someone was playing a practical joke on me. I yelled out something like, "Hey - what's going on?"

'But there was no answer. Nobody in the corridor. Just this foggy shape. I had a good look around to see if there might be any source of illumination beside the normal lighting. But there wasn't. Then, still hoping it was a joke, I theorised that a projector might be hidden somewhere and producing that image. But I soon realised that projection would have been physically impossible. The mist was in a recess and an operator would have had to beam the film around a corner.

'By this time I was going through a mixture of emotions. I sensed that something quite enormous and unexplained was happening. I'd have expected I'd be scared. But strangely enough I wasn't frightened at all. Weird though everything was, I felt amazingly peaceful and relaxed.

I've never really understood why that should be. I can remember thinking, standing there, "This isn't bad…there's nothing wrong."

'By this time I was overwhelmed by curiosity more than anything else. What was *the thing? I decided to find out, so I put my hand into the mist to see what it felt like. It was warm to the touch. But my action must have disturbed it in some way because after a couple more seconds it disappeared.*

'Despite the overall gentleness of this experience it left me pretty shaken. All I wanted was to get back to normality - and if possible to find a sensible, down-to- earth explanation for everything. I still had to get the notes for the program. I walked the few steps back to my office. Like every other office in the building it was always kept locked at nights and weekends. But my door, on this night, was standing ajar.

'I felt a really strong desire to share this experience with my listeners. But after some thought I said nothing, deciding I'd be much wiser to try to work out what had actually happened. When I got back to the studios on Monday I was still keeping everything bottled up. But in the end I simply had to share it with someone.

'I took the punt of confiding to one of my bosses, Bob Quinn, who was then the station's operations manager. Bob (I called him Mr Quinn in those days) was an approachable person who was liked and respected by everyone. Good-natured though he was, however, I was still a bit nervous about how he might respond to a story about a mist in a corridor. So I began to broach the subject in a very roundabout way.

'To my surprise Bob simply held up his hand to interrupt, and told me, "I understand what you're saying, David. We had someone die on air here years ago. A lovely bloke. It's believed that the spirit of that person is still at the station. Just leave it at that."

'I subsequently learned that the man was Jim Archer, a popular newsreader, who died at the microphone of a heart attack back in 3AW's past. He was plump, like the image I saw. Dennis Gibbons, an announcer colleague, validated my experience. He said he'd never seen the apparition himself but had spoken to other station staff who had.

'And me? Well, I've always been a reluctant witness. Even today, if you could prove to me that what I saw and felt that night was something perfectly ordinary and explicable, I'd be quite relieved, really. But until that proof comes along I'll rely on the evidence of my own senses - and

say that just once in my life I did see something that defied normal understanding.'

Many hauntings are linked to people who died in a state of shock. Parapsychologists theorise that the spirits of such victims may linger at the scene of the fatal trauma, too disturbed to move quietly on. A radio professional who suffered a cardiac arrest mid-broadcast would quite easily fit this category.

Did a Radio Star Write ‘Gags from the Grave’?

On 14 October 1959 the celebrated radio and TV quizmaster Jack Davey died after a long fight with cancer. Millions of Australians mourned him. After Davey’s city-stopping funeral - the biggest in Sydney’s history - uncanny events began to occur.

Central to the drama was Keith Smith, creator-compere of the high-rating TV programs ‘Pied Piper’ and ‘A Word from Children’.

Smith, who for 10 years had been Davey’s principal scriptwriter, said, ‘I believe it’s possible Jack has made repeated contact with me. The first hint that something strange was going on was when I was on tour. One wet night, while we were marooned in a hotel in Dungog, New South Wales, I read a magazine article about automatic writing. The author claimed that if you held a pencil to a paper for a while and concentrated, you’d start getting messages from spirits.

‘My assistant Pam Gildea, who’d been one of Jack’s offsiders, suggested we kill time by following the article’s instructions. At first the pen refused to move. But the moment I touched Pam’s hand with my finger the pen started up at once - and all kinds of messages, from foreign tongues to music, started coming through.

‘The following week, in Taree, we tried it again. This time the pen immediately wrote “HI HO!” - Jack’s famous trademark. We were shocked, *because the handwriting was unmistakably his.* A bit uneasy, but very curious, we began to ask questions. The pen skated across the paper at terrific speed while “Jack” described how he had died in St Vincent’s Hospital.

‘He told us how he’d tried to speak to his friends around the bed, but they were crying and took no notice. Suddenly he found himself looking down - and realised he was “out of register” with his own body. Next, he was floating near the hospital ceiling, while a silver cord, attaching him to his body below, slowly frayed.

‘In the end, two dead friends appeared to Jack and said they were taking him away. One was Mike Connors, the morning announcer. The other was the comedian George Blackshaw.

‘Frankly, Pam and I were thunderstruck by the messages that kept coming. But we were both sceptical enough to want to submit the “person” writing to every possible test…’

In his programs, Davey had always proved himself a master of creating on-the-spot limericks, in response to challenges from audience members. Keith Smith recalled, ‘I urged whoever was controlling the pen to complete a limerick whose first line I’d invented. My line was, “There once was a lovesick flea.” Jack’s handwriting immediately began flashing across the paper. The first of “Jack’s” lines read, “Fell in love with a lovesick bee.”

‘But then - in exactly the same way Jack had operated during our years together - the pen moved back and substituted “tone-deaf” for “lovesick”. The final limerick, completed in about 30 seconds, read:

There once was a lovesick flea
Fell in love with a tone-deaf bee.
As the night went along,
He sang her a song -
But she thought it was just repartee.

‘Pam and I had many conversations with the entity that claimed to be Jack Davey. At one stage the controller of the pen said his greatest regret in life was that he hadn’t taken enough time to really understand people. Whether we really were talking to Jack, I’ll never know.’

Announcer Alarmed - by a Brothel Ghost

For more than 50 years the Melbourne radio station 3UZ occupied a building formerly used as a brothel, at the top of Bourke Street. Staff members repeatedly claimed they had seen a transparent apparition, semi-human in shape, hovering in the studios. Some believed the ghost was a client who died while vigorously availing himself of an employee's services.

Breakfast compere Brian Markovic experienced the haunting at about 11.45 one night, when his only companions in the building were an all-night announcer and a newsreader.

'I was working back, preparing cartridges for the next day's show,' he told me. 'Suddenly, from the old radio theatre, I heard someone playing the piano. Curious as to who it might be at that time of night, I wandered into the auditorium. To my surprise the place was in darkness. But the light from the doorway in which I was standing shone on to the piano.

'No one was sitting at it - yet it was filling the theatre with the strains of an old-style tune I didn't recognise. Frankly I was scared out of my wits. I knew the thing wasn't a pianola and that there was no way it could be playing automatically. I got out of there, finished my work as fast as I could and went home.'

Phantom pianos feature in many Australian hauntings. During the 1980s numerous people who had walked past a derelict homestead near Campbelltown, Tasmania, reported hearing keyboard music emerging from the interior. A newspaper investigated the haunted homestead - and found neither a player nor a piano inside.

The two-storey house, its windows boarded and garden overgrown, was part of Wanstead Park, a property established in 1827 by the sheep breeder Richard Willis. The invisible musician was rumoured to be Marianne Willis, the family's oldest daughter, who sought solace in music after her fiance was killed. She was buried in the family vault on a hill overlooking the homestead.

Vicious Phantom ‘Tried to Kill’

The now-defunct Melbourne station 3XY was sometimes a frightening place to work. Engineers, announcers and other staff members were convinced that an unfriendly ghost - with occasionally murderous intentions - was sharing their studios. Radio and TV performer Colin McEwan was one witness prepared publicly to say that the spirit had actually tried to kill him.

Colin was 3XY’s all-night announcer in the late 1950s, when the station was housed in the old Princess Theatre on Spring Street. ‘Back in those days,’ he told me, ‘we all had to work crammed into a tangle of attic rooms. At around two o’clock one morning I put on a clutch of records and commercials and stepped out onto the old rickety stairs for a breather.

‘From where I stood you could see down into the dark, empty stalls with the great stage looming behind. I’d leaned on the stair-rail often enough before. But that night I felt uneasy. Then I knew why.

‘Suddenly something cold and strong grabbed my shoulder and shoved. For a moment it seemed I’d go pitching down the stairs and break my neck.

‘But I grabbed the rail like grim death - and then what seemed like some kind of crazy ghost was gone. I talked to other members of the night staff. All said they’d had brushes with whatever the thing was. Several weeks later I saw another frightening thing happen. I was sitting in the studio with two other staff members when the engineer walked in with a flask of coffee. Without any warning, something - something invisible - hurled him against the wall, with coffee and blood splattering everywhere.

‘I formed the opinion at that time - and didn’t revise it much afterward - that something malevolent was at work in our studios. Something that wanted us out of there - or dead.’

Colin McEwan’s predecessor as all-night host was a 16- year-old announcer named Bert Newton. He too had a brush with a ghost - but it was a happier experience. ‘In those days,’ Bert told me, ‘there were so few commercials in the wee hours that I’d sometimes play both sides of an album without a break.

‘One very black morning I put on the first side of a record - then, feeling lonely, wandered down to see the engineer, who was the only other person in the building. When I reached the control room he was asleep: not surprisingly, I suppose, as he was studying law during the day. I didn’t like to

wake him, so I wandered around for a while. I lost track of the time - and then I panicked. I realised that I'd been strolling for too long and the needle was probably scratching around on the record label.

'I rushed back upstairs, ready to apologise to the listeners. *But then, to my amazement I saw that someone had turned the record over. The needle was in the first track on the second side.*

'Naturally I thanked the engineer. But he denied having gone near the studio. The management confirmed to me next day that no one had been in the building at that hour. And security, even in those days, was too tight for an intruder to have entered. I'm sceptical about ghosts, but I'm forced to admit that something very weird happened that night.'

The 3XY phantom was still, seemingly, at work during the 1980s. Melbourne newspapers reported that a 'mysterious moaning' had bemused the breakfast show's 130,000 listeners. Engineers studied the tape, but could offer no explanation for the sounds.

(A fuller description of the Princess Theatre haunting appears later in this book.)

‘Poltergeist’ Caused Radio Mayhem

Two studio clocks mysteriously stopped when a woman, claiming to possess psychic powers, phoned radio station 4WK in Toowoomba, Queensland. Seconds after the self- styled clairvoyant had called a second time, the station’s telephones malfunctioned.

The caller, who identified herself only as ‘Sheila’, made a series of extravagant claims. On-air she told the talkback announcer Stuart Robertson that ‘a race of grey aliens’ had endowed her with extrasensory abilities. It would be her task, along with hundreds of other people, to prepare the world for their arrival.

Robertson spoke to Sheila for 20 minutes: much longer than most talkback exchanges. ‘Everything she told me sounded crazy,’ he said. ‘But something odd was going on, because the business of the clocks and the phones baffled everyone here.

‘It was only after Sheila had hung up from her first call that I noticed my studio clock had stopped at 11.52. I then realised I’d lost track of time during the interview. Assuming the midday news was due any minute I mentioned the stopped clock on-air, hoping someone would respond. A technician hurried in with a battery-powered replacement, but the instant he placed the new clock in front of me, it also stopped. That was a hell of a coincidence, because I’d never known any timepiece at this station to break down before.’

Staff members were alarmed by the woman’s subsequent call. ‘This time she rang to speak to one of our executives,’ Robertson said. ‘During the conversation, lights on the switchboard blinked on and off and there were strange clicking noises and interference.’

The twin mysteries of Sheila’s identity - and of how her telephone communications twice coincided with inexplicable events - have never been solved. Undoubtedly the phenomena at 4WK bore a strong resemblance to poltergeist activity, which, in numerous cases, is believed to emanate from a living person’s unconscious mind.

ANOTHER QUEENSLAND call sign plagued by paranormal events was 4AK - which had inherited its ghost from the building’s previous occupants. From the day, in 1979, that the station began transmitting from the *Toowoomba Chronicle’s* old premises in Margaret Street, staff complained of

uncanny interruptions to their work. Announcers, in particular, were thrown off balance during broadcasts by loud tappings on the walls, windows abruptly opening and lights clicking off and on. *Chronicle* journalists conceded that the phantom, thought to be a long-dead printer, had haunted the premises for longer than anyone could remember.

This wasn't good enough for 4AK's then-manager Jim Sweeney, who acidly asserted, 'I wish the *Chronicle* people would come and collect him… he's their ghost after all.'

Puzzle of the Perfumed Entity

For his first eight months on-air at Adelaide station 5KA, Peter Benn said nothing about the events that were making his 12-to-dawn shift a nightmare. But so intrusive did the haunting become that he finally took the problem to management.

He learned that the old deconsecrated church which housed 5KA's studios had long been the refuge of a ghost. Benn's story leaked to a newspaper, prompting previous announcers to describe similar problems.

'Like radio stations everywhere we have strong security overnight,' Peter Benn told me. 'I'm alone in the building and there's no way anyone can enter without my knowledge. That's why everything that's happening is so bizarre - there can't be any logical explanation.

'One night a moaning sound came from an adjoining room - followed by a noise that resembled a bottle rolling on a concrete floor. When I went to investigate, nobody - and nothing - was there. Another night, after coming back from the loo, I found that my logbook (which, naturally, I always keep open during a shift) was closed…with my pen placed neatly beside it.

'I've also heard whistling right behind me when I was alone in the building - and the heavy studio door has opened and closed of its own accord. But the strangest thing is the smell of perfume that sometimes accompanies these happenings. If this is a ghost I'd tend to believe it's a woman.'

Benn was impatient of sceptics who suggested his experiences resulted from drowsiness or small-hours hallucinations. 'I'm a clear-headed observer with no preconceived ideas - and these things are happening,' he said.

Haunted radio stations are an international phenomenon. Some parapsychologists surmise that the curious concentration of wraiths in radio is somehow associated with electronic equipment, which may (to quote one theorist) 'draw discarnate entities like moths to a light'. But this notion stands little scrutiny. If it were correct, television channels and organisations with large concentrations of computers would also be troubled. And that, overall, is not happening.

The Manager Who Refused to Retire

In 1986 an announcer at a Queensland regional station sent me a letter complaining about the manager - who happened to be dead.

‘I disbelieved in the supernatural until I started work in this town,’ he said. ‘After I’d worked here several days I was told about the old manager, how he died and how, supposedly, he looks after the station.

‘It wasn’t long before I saw things happening for myself. One morning I watched the breakfast announcer come into a room where staff notices were pinned on a board. There was no air-conditioning and no open doors or windows - but to my amazement the notices were suddenly hurled about as though in a hurricane.

‘Another time the night announcer was doing a request show. When he went to the library to collect the required records he found they were already poking out of the stacks. On the way back to the studio he heard a muffled voice addressing him.

‘Then there was my own experience. At about 12.30 one morning, another DJ and I saw an intercom light switch on in a studio. As not even a telephone company can turn on such a light from outside, we searched the station.

‘Everything was locked and the building was empty. I went into the studio and picked up the phone - and I swear on the Bible that I heard a click. Next day the other announcers said the old man was just testing me out.’

Phantoms of the Bush

A Silent Horseman's Sinister Secret

WHEN a young farmworker vanished overnight in central New South Wales, police and volunteers unsuccessfully searched for him across vast tracts of scrubland and plains. After three dispiriting weeks they unwillingly abandoned their attempts at rescue. Experienced bushmen predicted that the missing man was unlikely ever to be found. They were wrong. The mystery was finally solved - thanks to a series of disturbing events…

JAN SLATER WAS only eight when she first heard about the missing farmhand and the bizarre role her father and grandfather had played in finding his body. The story - factual, circumstantial, but profoundly strange - was already a legend in the New South Wales country district where she was growing up. Fascinated by its uncanny details, she would beg her father to describe again and again what had happened and what he had seen.

Decades later, while living in Mt Pritchard, NSW, she described the real-life (and real-death) drama to me:

'It happened in the 1940s. A worker had gone missing from a local farm - and despite an enormous search over about 20 days, neither the police nor volunteers could find a trace of him. While all this was going on, my dad and Grandpa were droving sheep near Condobolin and were obliged to camp out for several nights. The weather after sunset was unseasonably cold so the two of them habitually huddled close to their campfire.

'One night, as they were sitting sipping hot tea, a man rode by on a horse. As was the country custom my dad called out hello and offered the chap a cuppa - but he rode on without a word.

'My father and grandfather thought his behaviour was a little odd, but didn't spend much time puzzling over it. The following night, however, the man rode by again - ignoring their greetings a second time. Because people just didn't behave so rudely in the bush, my grandfather suspected something must be very wrong.

'Subsequently, when the horseman seemingly snubbed them a third time, Grandpa and Dad decided to quietly follow him to his camp, to see what the trouble was. However, after a couple of miles the rider and his horse suddenly disappeared.

'Dad and Grandpa were baffled. It didn't seem possible for the horseman to have simply vanished in that open terrain. They searched the area - and finally found a drover and his horse lying dead in a deep mineshaft. This was the man rescuers had been seeking for weeks.

'The police said the man must have been riding at night and fallen down the shaft, along with his horse. Until that moment, my dad and grandfather had thought their mysterious rider was a solid human being. Now they concluded they'd been looking at the ghost of a man

who was mutely begging for his body to be found - and properly buried.'

Ghost Sent a Killer to the Gallows

Condobolin's silent horseman was not the only spectre to have directed searchers to a bush grave. On a warm spring evening in October 1826 the phantom of what later would be identified as a murder victim reportedly materialised beside a farm fence. The entity gestured toward a small creek which wound across the paddocks. As a frightened witness watched, the figure slowly disappeared from view, apparently following the creek's course.

Aided by Aboriginal trackers, policemen the following day found a marshy trench in which the brutally battered corpse of a missing man lay shallowly buried. The killer was arrested soon afterward. These events, central to what would become Australia's most celebrated haunting, occurred in Campbelltown, New South Wales.

In the early 19th century the township was a sparsely populated carriage-stop whose most prominent landmarks were a church, a courthouse, a jail, a smithy and two public houses. The village was surrounded by large rural estates, one of which was owned by Frederick Fisher, a former convict who had become rich in the colony. One of Fisher's employees was a fellow ex-prisoner, George Worrall. It was rumoured that the men shared secret business interests.

On the night of 17 June 1826 Fisher and Worrall drank with three neighbours at one of the town's ramshackle inns. Fisher left early. It was the last time anyone saw him alive.

The local clergyman, Reverend Thomas Reddall, who doubled as the town's magistrate, was immediately concerned - and questioned Worrall closely. Worrall claimed that his employer, fearful of being discovered in a fraudulent property deal, had decamped to Sydney and from there returned by ship to England. The clergyman remained suspicious, but had no evidence that might have carried his investigation further.

The breakthrough in the case came four months later when a local farmer, William Farley, hammered panic-stricken on Reddall's door. He claimed that while he was travelling home in his cart, just past the Camden turnoff, his horse had suddenly shied. Farley looked up and immediately saw the cause. The tall, imposing and 'unmistakable' figure of Frederick Fisher, in white and ghostly form, was sitting on a fence, just feet away. While the

farmer stood staring, the apparition raised its right arm and pointed in the direction of a creek meandering through a nearby paddock. It then rose slowly and flew toward the waterway, following the curving banks until it vanished.

The magistrate took meticulous notes, even reproducing several of Farley's remarks:

'A horse won't pass a dead person, sir - that's why it reared.'

'…Sure as I live, sir, I could see that ghost as plainly as I see you.'

Enjoining Farley to say nothing to anyone, Reverend Reddall sent an urgent message to Sydney. Next day a party of constables and Aboriginal trackers arrived. They achieved quick results. The senior policeman, Constable George Leeland, found blood smeared on the fence rail where the ghost had reportedly sat. Someone had tried to burn the bloodstains away. The Aboriginal trackers then led a search along the creek, directing the policemen to a stretch of marshy ground. A tracker thrust an iron rod into the mud and announced, 'Here!'

The constables had brought spades. It took them only minutes to unearth the body of Frederick Fisher.

At the inquest, the coroner found that Fisher had been clubbed to death, the blows fracturing his skull in several places and spilling brain matter. The verdict: murder by a person or persons unknown.

Worrall was arrested soon afterward. He had convicted himself when he tried to pass a forged document. Allegedly written by Fisher five months earlier, it transferred to Worrall the deeds to the farm. At his trial for murder Worrall claimed that he had killed Frederick Fisher accidentally. While driving a horse out of a crop of wheat, he had tried to strike it with a paling and inadvertently hit Fisher instead. This story was judged as false as the document that had damned Worrall in the first place. Fisher had not been felled by a single, accidental blow. He had been brutally struck about the head many times.

George Worrall was found guilty of murder. He was hanged in the Old Yard overlooking George Street, Sydney.

Almost two centuries later, Fisher's ghost continues to generate argument. Sceptics say that farmer William Farley probably invented the

apparition in a bid to divert suspicion from himself. Others believe that this was an authentic case of spirit intervention in the cause of justice.

Controversial though it may be, this classic Australian case fits a pattern chronicled by paranormal research organisations worldwide. The societies' casebooks abound with reports of ghosts determined that their murders be avenged, or anxious that their mortal remains be cared for. In one celebrated British incident a schoolteacher began to haunt his family 10 years after his death. An adult grandson inspected the man's grave. It was in a part of the cemetery that had been flooded by a swollen stream. The coffin was relocated - and the haunting ceased.

THE BALLAD OF FISHER'S GHOST

In the Colony of New South Wales,
Long miles from London Town,
There liv'd a man named FISHER,
Whom DEATH could not strike down.

Chorus

O, clubbed about the pate was he,
And buried in the mud,
Yet his GHOST broke free
To o'ersee
The avenging of his blood.

'Twas a farmer's horse saw FISHER,
Enwrapp'd in tomb-shroud white.
It peer'd, it rear'd, it disappear'd
Into the black Bush night.

Struck down before his time was he,
Unpray'd for, hidden deep,
But his GHOST cried loud
From its slimy shroud,
"REVENGE! Or I'll never sleep!"

The farmer stagger'd to his feet,
And met the PHANTOM's eye,
And heard it shout, in righteous wrath,
"Mark well! My grave is nigh."

Constabulary found the bones,
And swiftly sheeted blame
Upon the EVIL MURDER'R,
George Worrall was his name.

'Neath leaden sky, they hang'd him high,
For sorely had he sinn'd.
And he sniff'd the smell of the flames of HELL,
As he twisted in the wind.

O, poor lov'd, gentle FISHER,
Deep-buried in the mud.
Thy GHOST burst free

To o’ersee
The avenging of thy blood!

The Death Light that Shocked Three Stockmen

My files contain hundreds of first-hand accounts of phantoms that have been seen or heard in the Australian bush.

A particularly disturbing event involving three witnesses was described to me by Jim Lawlor of Mascot, New South Wales. ‘I was working in the Gulf of Carpentaria,’ he told me. ‘At about six one morning, when we were about to make breakfast, we realised that one of our mates, a drover, had gone missing. We dropped everything and spent days searching. But when we found him at last he was lying dead, where he’d been thrown from his horse.

‘We decided to camp at the site overnight and take the body back in the morning - a decision we would soon regret. That evening I was getting wood for the fire when something compelled me to look across to the spot where we’d found our mate.

‘A bright white light was floating directly above the place where his body had lain.

‘I yelled for my friends and one of them raced out with a rifle. But when he saw that light he dropped the gun and ran for his life. The light hung there for another five minutes before the darkness closed around it. We all discussed it for days afterwards - and one theory we thought hard about was that our dead mate had somehow managed to come back, briefly, to say goodbye.’

ANOTHER CASE of an outback entity which seemed to be purposeful in its behaviour was described to me by N.D. Collette of Deception Bay, Queensland. After migrating to Australia from Sri Lanka, I got a job at a sheep station near Narrabri,’ he said. ‘Our cottage was several yards from a creek. One morning my wife told me she’d been unable to sleep the previous night - so had got up to make tea.

‘While waiting for the kettle to boil she glanced out of the window and saw a man - he seemed to be very old - walking along the creek bank, carrying a hurricane lantern. My wife was considerably disturbed by the look of this person. She couldn’t explain why, but simply kept repeating that there was “something wrong” about him. Next day, hoping to set her mind at rest, I asked the manager who the old bloke was.

‘He gave me quite a shock when he replied that it was no one living. It was the ghost of Old Joe, an odd-job man who used to herd goats in the area many years before. Joe apparently knew all his animals by name, and if one strayed he’d search for it at night with that hurricane lantern. I never saw the apparition myself - but during the time I worked on that property, I learned that everyone took Old Joe for granted. He’d been dutiful while he was alive and it was well known in the district that he’d stayed that way long after he was buried.’

Drowned Spectre Disturbs a Hotel

In February 2005, at exactly four o'clock in the morning, a loud blast resonated through the tiny Barwon Hotel in Winchelsea, Victoria. Publican Bob Atkins was unsure for a moment where the noise had come from. 'But then I checked our private bathroom,' he told me. 'A can of hairspray, which my wife had left on a shelf, had exploded and hit the far wall. The force must have been pretty intense, because the can was still rolling back and forth when I got there around 30 seconds later.

'The tin had been sitting in our bathroom for months - and we could think of absolutely no reason why it had blown up. There was no source of heat and it was a mild night. It was just another of the unexplainable things that have happened here since we took charge a year ago.'

Bob Atkins had been warned, before he moved in, about the inn's resident spirit. As a sceptic he hadn't expected anything significant to happen. After a few months, however, the first of a series of mysterious events began to occur. Plates, glasses, account books and other items would inexplicably vanish - later resurfacing elsewhere in the building (a phenomenon commonly noted in cases of paranormal activity). At night, the couple would apply the security clamps at the top of the double doors - only to find them unbolted in the morning.

The Barwon, built in 1843, has been haunted for more than a century. When I first investigated the case, locals assured me that the phenomena were caused by the ghost of a stockman who drowned in the nearby river in 1894.

Chef Rick Robertson recalled disconcerting events which occurred while he was spending a night in the bluestone staff quarters. 'It was exceptionally chilly and the river was swollen,' he recalled. 'I was fast asleep when I was woken by waves of bitter cold. Astonishingly the room was full of mist - the only time I'd ever seen it drift all the way up from the river into the pub. It filled the room and was suffocating, like snow being pressed into your face. I tried to get out of bed and wake the other two guys in the room, but I couldn't move. I seemed to be frozen solid.

'I tried to yell, but I couldn't make a bloody sound. The paralysis lasted for about 20 minutes. Then the mist disappeared along with the ghost - and the room warmed up again. I'm a big bloke and I don't scare easily - but those were the most alarming moments of my whole life.'

Witnesses to hauntings often speak of being paralysed and struck dumb. Some parapsychologists believe this ‘loss of power’, sometimes combined with sudden drops in temperature, may be caused by the entity sucking energy from the room.

The Miner and the Frozen Phantom

A similar story of terror and bitter temperatures was told to me by R.J. Billings of Rosebery, Tasmania.

'I'm trained to deal only with facts,' he wrote. 'But I have no doubt about the incredible thing I - and colleagues - saw in a Peko Mines shaft at Warrego in the Northern Territory.

'For weeks this major mining project had been suffering from bad luck, with injuries and equipment breakdowns. I found myself becoming really disturbed by the place - especially by the first hole, where the temperature would suddenly drop remarkably, making the hair on my neck prickle. One afternoon, trying to fight down a powerful compulsion to run away, I returned to the hole to pick up drill steels. Suddenly my hair stood on end as I felt someone brushing the back of my neck.

'I swung around - and in the glow of my cap lamp saw a human figure standing about 10 metres away. It was shadowy and seemed to be naked. I got out as fast as I could. Colleagues subsequently told me that they had seen the figure also. It was generally believed to be the spirit of an engineer who died in the area.'

IN JANUARY 1986, workers at a remote gold mine in Australia's north were mystified by an entity which may or may not have been of human origin. The haunting was described to me by Territorian Frank Dunston of Berry Springs:

> *'I was employed at the Granites mine construction camp in the Tanami Desert. One evening just after sunset I was in my demountable room, lying on the bunk reading a book. Suddenly the room was filled with a continuous, hollow-sounding wailing noise. Nothing was visible - but I could sense something hovering about 60 centimetres from my face, weaving and bobbing and making that weird sound. I lay still and said nothing. After a good five minutes the being - or whatever it was - seemed to tire of its sport and left at high speed with a long departing clamour.*
>
> *'At dusk the following evening the thing returned. I first heard it speeding through the camp, then it filled my room with a deafening cacophony. This time it only stayed for about 30 seconds, before apparently deciding that I was no fun at all. It subsequently moved into*

an adjacent demountable, where I continued to hear it for a long period.

'At no time did I feel threatened by this visitor - and I now regret not having spoken. I belatedly believe it was looking for some kind of reaction from me - and shrugged me off as a dead loss when I didn't respond.

'The history of mining at the Granites goes back to 1900, and many goldseekers, black and white, died there in the early years. However, I don't believe this entity was a ghost. There was no drop in temperature (the room was air conditioned anyway) and all the usual reported signs of phantom visitation were missing. I think the thing was much more likely to have been a genius loci, or local guardian spirit.'

Apparition Alarmed a Brisbane Councillor

Jim Matheson JP, a Brisbane city councillor, was so shaken by his encounter with a bushland ghost that in 1957 he published the details for posterity.

The nightmare, Matheson claimed, began when he was driving alongside Queensland's historic Blairmore Station. On a corner, his car skidded into deep mud. Unable to drive it back onto the bitumen he climbed into the rear seat to sleep overnight. As he began to doze, a second car, containing a businessman and his wife, became bogged close by. After trying unsuccessfully to help free the couple, Matheson returned to his vehicle.

He was woken a second time by piteous cries for help, which seemed to be coming from a nearby paddock. He pulled on his boots and waded through the mud toward the sounds. Suddenly, in the drizzling darkness, he noticed a flickering light. Assuming it was attached to a car or motorcycle he struggled on. But as he drew closer he realised that the light was not a part of anything else. It was floating freely, swirling and constantly changing shape.

'The light began to seep towards me,' Matheson recalled. 'I was simply terrified - and all my instincts told me to run. But I couldn't move. I just stood there, frozen.'

He was saved by the screams of the woman in the second car. 'In some way I never understood, the sound freed me,' Matheson recalled. 'I was able to turn around and scramble away across the paddock.'

Too wary to sleep, the three people made a fire from sticks and paper and stayed close to it all night. Next day Jim Matheson searched the paddock, but could find no trace of whatever had threatened him. Several days later, however, a cattleman insisted that the light he had encountered was what local Aboriginals called 'the debil- debil' of Blairmore Station.

On Christmas Eve 1869 a postman had been delivering letters to the station when he had a seizure and was pronounced dead. However, Aboriginals were convinced that he had still been breathing shallowly when the coffin lid was nailed down. Having suffered the horror of live interment, he had lingered as a sinister avenging spirit.

STEED WAS SCARED, BY A GHOSTLY GULLY

Another account of a horse that ‘sensed’ a murder was related to me by Don Wilmott of Carindale, Queensland.

‘It happened when I was a young man,’ he said. ‘I was riding home one night, returning from a euchre game. The route I planned to take included a gully, which was spanned by a small wooden bridge. I was slouched comfortably in the saddle, half-asleep, when my horse suddenly snorted and reared - almost throwing me.

‘Now wide awake I saw we were about to cross that bridge - and looked to see what had spooked the animal. As nothing was visible I nudged him in the ribs and urged him forward. Again, he snorted wildly and flinched back. Try as I might I couldn’t get him to cross that bridge. Finally I had to lead him further down the gully, then walk him over.

‘The incident puzzled me, especially as the horse had crossed the bridge without hesitation earlier in the day. I mentioned the mystery to a neighbour. He immediately said, “Your horse isn’t the only one that shies from that place at night. A man was killed there three years ago - and since then no animal will go near it in the dark.”’

Fear in Public Places

The Spectre That Stopped a City

The quiet Brisbane suburb of Herston had never known anything like it. Teeming crowds, traffic jams, jostling TV crews, police patrol cars and Black Marias: all here because of an aggressive entity which had appeared - again - in a local park. The latest victim was a 14-year-old schoolboy, who, after his ordeal, was treated for shock in Brisbane General Hospital. The entire city buzzed with speculation about the multiply witnessed phantom and the ugly murder believed by some to have unleashed it. And thousands were now hoping to glimpse the ghost for themselves…

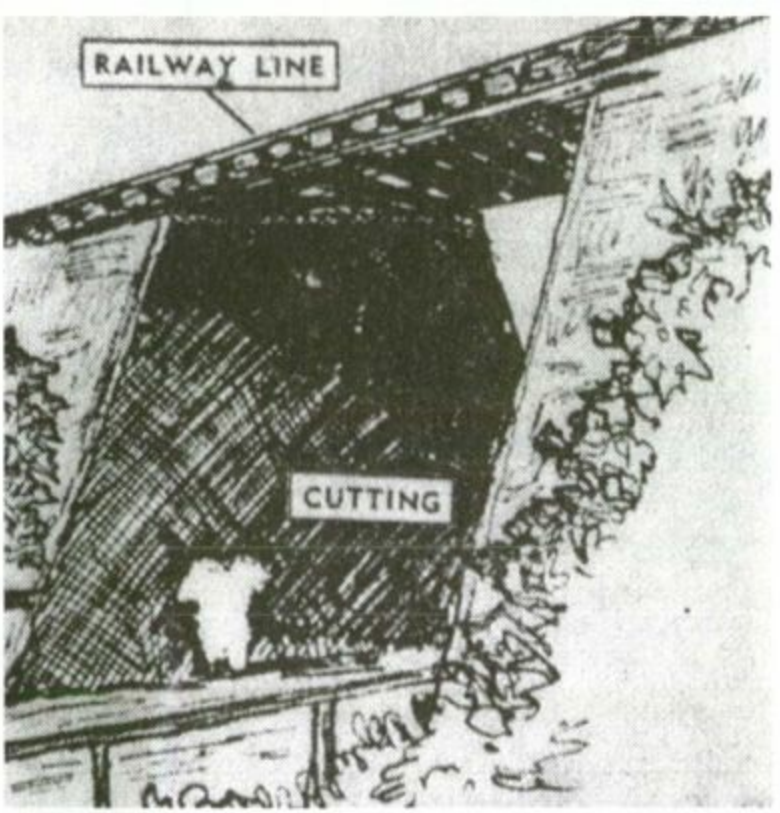
ON A HOT SUMMER NIGHT in November 1965, shop assistant Beverley Neilsen decided to take a walk through the relatively cool climes of Brisbane's Victoria Park. She was accompanied by her 14-year-old brother Allan, his schoolfriend Eric Pickett and a workmate, Barbara Hoddonot.

Slapping at mosquitoes, the four young people strolled past a weed-covered lake and toward a railway bridge whose supporting banks framed a dark pedestrian underpass. They agreed later that they had all heard the noise at the same time. 'It was a rustling sound,' Beverley told the *Courier Mail*. 'There was also something bright in the trees - a shape that looked as though smoke was coming from its edges. We ran - and we thought Allan was following.'

But Allan Neilsen was lingering behind. He had seen something in the underpass -a light of some kind - and was walking down to investigate. When they heard his single brief scream Beverley, Barbara and Eric wheeled around and ran back. Allan was standing, frozen and statue-like, about three metres from the subway entrance. He seemed to have had a seizure of some kind. When Beverley touched him he collapsed onto the grass.

'With help from some other people in the park, we got him into a car in Gilchrist Avenue,' Beverley said. 'But he wanted to go back. He seemed to be in a trance.'

Within 15 minutes Allan Neilsen had been admitted to Brisbane General Hospital. Doctors diagnosed shock and sedated him. Next morning he was well enough to tell a contingent of print, TV and radio reporters what he had seen:



Artist's composite sketch of the apparition more than 100 people reported seeing in Brisbane's Victoria Park underpass. ***Courtesy Courier Mail***

'I was getting close to the subway when something floated out from the concrete wall. It was misty and a bluish-white colour and in the shape of a person…or part of a person. It was a torso mostly…no arms, no head and the legs disappearing at knee-level.

'The thing was floating in the middle of the subway - then it started moving in my direction. That's all I can remember before I woke in hospital.'

In the days after the story broke, more than 100 people came forward to say that they too had seen the apparition - always after dark. One man reportedly attacked the entity with a flamethrower. Don Ashe of Enoggerra said he had seen 'a white cloud in human shape emerge from behind a tree' and added, 'I've never been so scared in my life.' Most of the reported sightings had been in the underpass, but some witnesses said they had watched the 'luminous half- body' or 'jacket-shape' floating above the lake. This claim prompted sceptical observers to suggest that the entity might be nothing more than marsh gas.

Speculation about the Victoria Park haunting swept Queensland. Entire families migrated to the park at night hoping to get a glimpse of the ghost.

Country people, their utilities laden with food, camping gear, torches and transistor radios drove hundreds of kilometres to participate. Chaos greeted them. Night after night, all roads and streets surrounding the parklands were gridlocked by buses, lines of double-parked cars, police patrol units and television crews competing for a vantage point. On a single Saturday evening an estimated 5000 onlookers packed the area. There was no room on the grass to spread picnic rugs. Young men misbehaved by throwing rocks at passing trains. And the subway itself became so crammed with sightseers that, as one columnist suggested, 'the ghost might be having trouble squeezing out of the wall'.

Amid the crowds and the clamour the phantom failed to reappear. And that, opined retired criminal psychiatrist Dr John McGeorge, was because it had never existed in the first place. 'The so-called witnesses who claim they have seen an apparition are victims of hysteria,' he confidently pronounced. 'Police should prevent young people from forming cohesive groups in such circumstances. Immature youngsters, inspired by deep superstitious fears and awe, develop a highly emotional state very quickly - and this can become a dangerous force. Mass juvenile emotional explosions are difficult to control once they have been triggered. Decent young girls are in danger in a situation like this.'

Dr McGeorge's sentiments left scores of newspaper readers (who starkly knew what they had experienced) unimpressed.

The *Sunday Mail* reported, 'A surprising number of Queensland people believe they have seen, or felt, a ghost. Many of them wrote to us …' Among the letters:

> *Don't sneer at the idea of ghosts. Back in 1918 I lived in a house at Bowen Hills, not far from your present building. One morning in the early hours my mother was wakened by a noise. She got out of bed, switched on the hall light and walking through the lounge saw her mother standing opposite the clock. The time was 1.10 am.*
>
> *For 40 years my mother had not seen her mother who lived in Maryborough. She hurried back to my father and told him. He said, 'Don't be stupid.' Next morning my mother received a telegram saying, 'Mother died at 1.10 am today.'*

[Parapsychologists commonly describe an event of this kind as a 'crisis apparition'. See page 25.]

I once lived in an old two-storey house and was going to bed one night when I saw the shadowy outline of a man on a landing. He looked at me for a moment as I stood petrified with fear, and then glided into the bathroom. My mother looked at my white face when I went downstairs. Later she said, 'You saw something upstairs, didn't you? Don't worry, I've seen it many times and it's harmless.' Then, for the first time she told me that the previous occupant had drowned himself in our bathroom.'

In December 1965, after the crowds had ebbed from Victoria Park, the underpass entity began, reportedly, to appear again. An academic pointed out that the phantom had a history - having reportedly been seen in the parklands as early as 1903. Witnesses, interviewed in contemporary newspapers, said the entity was shaped like a nun and floated beneath the trees.

According to 56-year-old George Reece, an ANZ Bank employee, the ghost had also manifested itself in 1922. 'My father, Matthew, worked for the City Council at that time as park caretaker,' he recalled. 'He and my mother Catherine often walked together through the park. One afternoon she got a terrible shock when she saw a grey, shimmering form up ahead. As she drew my father's attention to the thing it vanished in the railway cutting.

'It had been normal for all of us to walk through the cutting - but after this experience, nothing would induce my mother to go through it again. I was only about 12 back then - but I can remember my parents talking to quite a few other people in the area, who'd also seen the shape.'

Over the years there have been further sporadic reports of the Victoria Park phantom - but the intense response from Brisbane's population in 1965 has not been repeated.

What might be causing the haunting? It has long been established that the distress and pain of suicide or murder may create paranormal phenomena that resonate for long stretches of time. If we pursue this supposition, there are two theories (albeit shaky ones) that suggest who, or what, the Victoria Park ghost might be:

- On 14 September 1952 a vagrant, Walter Hall, who regularly slept in the parklands, was beaten to death with a broken bottle. The killer dumped Hall's corpse in the pond beside the railway cutting.
- On 17 November 1960 a widow, Kate Ryan, was found raped and

strangled on a vacant allotment at West End. Police questioned a Swedish migrant but did not charge him. On 29 November the man slashed his wrists, then threw himself under a train at Victoria Park, losing two limbs.

The latter case resonates to some degree with Allan Neilsen's description of a torso with legs severed at knee- level. But neither theory can explain the sightings of 1903 and 1922. In the case of the Victoria Park entity, little can be proved: other than the fact that few, if any, ghost mysteries seem solvable by investigative logic.

Sydney’s Chilling Cop-Shop

In 1891 two prisoners hanged themselves, at different times, from trees in the gardens of Rose Bay police station in Sydney.

Through the generations that followed, the converted cottage acquired a reputation for being (in the words of one officer) ‘badly haunted’. A sergeant said, ‘I’ve seen a lot of things in my time as a policeman, but nothing ever matched being put on night shift at Rose Bay…it was eerie.

The haunted police station in Sydney’s Rose Bay

‘On hot summer nights, when you’d have sweat dripping from your face, the building’s temperature would suddenly drop to near-freezing point. You’d find yourself shivering in the middle of a heatwave. During these times phones would ring repeatedly - but when we picked up there’d only be a dial tone. We were always calling technicians in, but they could never find anything wrong.’

Another sergeant, Bob Raymond, told me, ‘When I was at Rose Bay there was constant talk about the so-called ghosts. Happily I never experienced anything, but one of my colleagues was very disturbed by what was happening. He described how he’d hear unexplainable noises at night, and how doors would close and open when no one was around.’

I interviewed a young constable who recalled ‘cold gusts of wind’ that blew papers around when conditions outside were hot and still.

‘But my worst experience came one quiet night when I was reading the paper,’ he said. ‘I was alone, and had just started sipping a cup of hot coffee. I put the cup down for a few seconds, so I could turn the page. When I took

my second sip - no more than a few seconds after the first one - I spat it out.

‘The coffee had gone stone-cold - as if it had come straight from a fridge. There was no practical joke involved. No one else could have come into that room without me knowing.’

Greeted by Grasping Hands

Fremantle's Arts Centre and History Museum is often called the most haunted building in the southern hemisphere. Whenever I mention its name on radio or in press articles I can rely on receiving at least one letter from someone with personal knowledge of its myriad entities.

An account which has lingered particularly vividly in my memory came from Mrs E. Jones of Scarborough, Western Australia:

'The old museum building was originally used as an asylum and later as an old people's home. Years ago, my sister attended art classes there. One very hot day she popped out for a drink of water and took a wrong turning.

'Intending to ask for directions back to the classroom she opened a door. Immediately she had the dreadful feeling that hundreds of hands were reaching out trying to pull her into the room. She screamed and ran.

'Staff members told her she'd wandered into the former cell where the worst cases had been kept.'

The limestone-brick Arts Centre, with its high walls and gothic facade, was built by convict labour. It opened as a 'lunatic asylum' in 1867 and was governed on the lines of Britain's Bedlam hospital for the insane. The only treatment the mentally unbalanced inmates received was of a brutally violent kind. In 1909, after a series of scandals involving several deaths, the asylum was closed. The building then became in turn a nursing home, a US Army headquarters and a technical college - until in 1970 a museum opened on the site.

The misery of the thousands who suffered in the building still resonates. The spectre that both staff and visitors most often claim to see is of a woman in a grey shift, almost always in the Investigator gallery. She is believed to be connected in some way to an inmate who - believing her daughter had been abducted - jumped to her death. A sobbing sound which sometimes emerges from another room is said to be the 'echo' of a psychiatric patient who - weakened by starvation and beatings - was clubbed to death shortly before the asylum was closed.

Other phenomena include a foggy figure seen standing at a window, locks which seize up, defying staff attempts to open them - and 'invisibles'

which startle visitors by gently kissing them on the neck or cheek.

‘In some rooms we get cold spots that nobody can logically explain,’ recalled Emma Phillips, an Arts Centre executive. ‘It’s hard to argue with it…this is an extremely haunted place.’

The oddest experience in my file on the Arts Centre was related to me in 1996 by a lecturer at Melbourne University: *‘I’m still trying to make sense of this. While I was spending a week with my girlfriend at a Sydney hotel I had a recurring nightmare. It woke me up most nights we were there. The events in the dream were always the same. A ragged young woman was screaming to be freed from a locked room. Her suffering was so intense that I longed to open the door and save her - but every time, I was too frightened to enter that room; a fact that left me feeling cowardly and inadequate.*

‘The following year we went to Western Australia to visit my girlfriend’s sister. She and her husband showed us around - and one of our stop-off spots was the Fremantle Arts Centre. I’d barely heard of the place - and certainly knew nothing of its history. But as soon as we got inside, I thought I recognised scenes from my nightmare. Those feelings of fear - which till then I’d forgotten all about - resurfaced. I felt sick and had to go outside into the fresh air.

‘Later, my girlfriend’s sister suggested jokingly that I might have seen a ghost. When she then told me about the centre’s past, and about its reputation, I felt very shaky and odd. I knew that in my dreams I’d had a patchily detailed foreglimpse of a place I’d never seen. I’d also experienced the terrible emotions that were still being felt there. I think about this a lot - and sometimes I wonder if the spirit of that young woman somehow reached out to me while I was asleep.’

Shadows Shattered a Mountain's Peace

In 1985 the new owners of a small shop in the Melbourne mountain suburb of Belgrave discovered ghosts on their premises. Co-proprietors John Kliska and Doug Pearce described the shadowy entities as 'extremely unfriendly'. John Kliska told me:

'The troubles started soon after we took over the old building. One Sunday morning while I was in the back room unpacking stock the door slammed loudly behind me. I tried to open it - but it seemed to have been locked from the other side - seemingly impossible as I was the only person on the property.

'I called a neighbour for help. He was astonished to find three vertical bolts pushed firmly into place, sealing me in.'

Daryl Gladwin, who rented a room above the shop, said, 'I had exactly the same experience. I was alone working when I heard bolts on my door thudding into place, trapping me. I had to shout across the street for help.'

I spoke to locals who told me that the old building had been troubled by entities - often described as 'shadowy' - for as long as anyone could remember. The silhouettes, in the shape of two stooped elderly men and a small girl, were notorious for their unpleasant tricks, which ranged from throwing objects about to violent attacks. In the 1950s 'something unseen' even tried to hurl a woman employee down the stairs. (Her experience was not unique. Elsewhere in this book I describe two similar cases. The first victim was a Victorian hotel licensee whose ankle was shattered when an 'invisible force' pushed him violently down a stairwell; the second, a TV compere who recalls how something 'cold and strong' tried to shove him down a steep flight of stairs in Melbourne's Princess Theatre.)

Disturbed, but also intrigued by the remarkable events occurring around them, Kliska and Pearce quickly became experts on their haunted shop's history. They learned that in 1940 a store manager had suicided in the upstairs back room. In 1978 a manager had died in a shooting accident. 'A former owner's wife has told us she saw one of the ghosts,' Daryl Gladwin said. 'She flatly refused to describe it, saying it was too horrible to put into words. I know what she was talking about. Whatever we have here tends to

create a brooding feeling in the air. At one stage I slept upstairs for six weeks. The atmosphere was so malevolent I didn’t dare venture outside the door all night.’

The Ghost and the Governor General

For almost a century Yarralumla, the governor general's residence in Canberra, has been haunted.

The mansion's vice-regal residents are usually reluctant to admit that a phantom stalks their premises. But in a newspaper interview more than three decades ago, Sir Murray Tyrell let the spectral cat out of the bag.

Sir Murray was private secretary to a succession of governors general from 1947 to 1973. In an interview published 27 August 1970 he told the *Canberra Times* about his frightening brush with the unknown. It had occurred, he said, seven years earlier, when police and Yarralumla staff were preparing for a visit by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Sir Murray first became aware something was amiss when a caretaker burst into his office to report an intruder. 'I rushed out to see a figure - or presence - drifting up the stairs,' Sir Murray later recalled. 'It had no hands and no feet and I could see the stairs under it…I shouted but the figure took no notice, so I ran up the stairs after it. When I reached the top it had disappeared.'

Lady Tyrell indirectly encountered the phantom. 'It happened several weeks after my husband's experience,' she said. 'Princess Marina was a guest at Yarralumla and some policemen had been assigned to keep guard. When my husband told the officers about the ghost they laughed, thinking he was joking. But they soon changed their minds. Our house was near the main building and at 2 am a policeman woke us with a frantic phone call.

'He said, "Come quickly, there's someone in the house." We subsequently learned they'd seen something wearing a long cape drifting up the stairs. They brought in a police German shepherd to check the stairway. But the dog refused to go up…it crouched whimpering at the bottom.

'Two hours later the police came to our house saying they'd found no one. That dog was still cringing and miserable, its tail between its legs. I went to give it a comforting pat but the policeman warned, "Don't touch him! His nerves are gone." I've always found it hard to believe in ghosts, but something very strange happened at Yarralumla that night.'

Early last century, when Yarralumla was still a grazing property, an historian explored a stone vault in the garden, built to house the remains of

Colonel Gibbes, a previous owner. The historian discovered a cobwebbed manuscript, handwritten and unsigned, which he immediately delivered to Frederick Campbell, his host. Campbell believed the document to be genuine, but its authenticity has since been questioned. It read:

> *In 1826 a large diamond was stolen from James Cobbity, on a station in Queensland…The theft was traced to (a convict) who had run away. The convict was captured in 1858, but the diamond could not be traced, neither would the convict give any information, in spite of frequent floggings…(However) he left a statement to a groom and a map of the hiding place of the missing diamond.*
>
> *…The groom and his family lived out west for several years, according to Rev. James Hassall. I have no reason to think he tried to sell the diamond. Probably the ownership of a thing so valuable would bring suspicion. After (the groom's) death his son took possession of the jewel, and with a trusty blackfellow set off for Sydney. After leaving Cooma, they met with a bushranging gang…The blackfellow was captured and searched to no avail, for he had swallowed the jewel.*
>
> *The gang, in anger, shot him. He was buried in a piece of land belonging to Colonel Gibbes and later Mr Campbell. I believe the diamond to be among his bones. It is of great value. My hand is enfeebled with age, or I should describe the troubles through which I have passed. My life has been wasted, my money expended. I die almost destitute and in sight of my goal. I believe the grave to be under a large deodar tree. Buried by blacks, it would be in a round hole…*
>
> *Written near Yarralumla, 1881.*

This purported testament encouraged the popular belief that the phantom was the spirit of a courageously defiant Aboriginal whose bones (along with the swallowed diamond) lay entangled in the roots of Yarralumla's grand old deodar tree. Happily, Frederick Campbell was never tempted to uproot the magnificent deodar, diamond or not. His vice-regal successors exercised similar restraint.

But was the story true? In 1984 Sergeant Bill Wittle, a former Yarralumla security guard, suggested that the manuscript was probably a hoax, played by two holidaying schoolgirls. In his memoirs he described how a female visitor, 'Mrs Little', had introduced herself to him as Kate,

Frederick Campbell's daughter. The woman said that she and an equally bored friend had taken a sheet of parchment notepaper from her father's study, concocted the message, then planted it, freshly grimed and cobwebbed, in the vault.

Believers in the deodar tree manuscript were outraged. Hoping to find some flaw in the expose, they immediately checked the relevant Yarralumla visitors' book. Sure enough, the name 'Mrs Little' was there. But it didn't add up, because Frederick Campbell's daughter had never been the wife of a man named Little. Her married name was Newman.

Had the self-described Kate Campbell's story of a hoax been a hoax in itself? Possibly. But in evidential terms it hardly matters. A large number of eyewitnesses, including police and vice-regal employees, have sufficiently confirmed that Yarralumla is haunted - by *something* or *someone*, unknown.

The Many Ghosts of Monte Cristo

The House that Beckoned

The Monte Cristo homestead, which dominates a hilltop in Junee, New South Wales, has long been known as a cauldron of disturbing phenomena. Hens inside a padlocked fowlhouse have been found with their necks wrung. The phantom of a murdered child, inexplicably torn from her nanny's arms, lingers in the stairwell. A smell of burning has permeated the stables, in which a farmworker died after his straw bed was set alight. The homestead, troubled by uncountable numbers of ghosts, attracts parapsychologists from around the world. Specialist observers generally agree that Monte Cristo is Australia's most haunted house…

REG RYAN HAS never forgotten the first time he saw Monte Cristo. He even remembers the date: 10 September 1955 - a Saturday. It was shortly after 11 o'clock on a warm spring morning and 21-year- old Reg was teaching a friend how to drive. The pupil was proving quite good for a beginner - and Reg, after initial nervousness, had settled back to enjoy the day.

The road, through Junee, New South Wales, took them past a green hill on which an imposing homestead loomed. For reasons he has never entirely understood, Reg was immediately intrigued. He asked his friend to pull over. The pair climbed the hill for a closer look. As they approached they realised that the edifice - impressive from a distance - was in a state of near-terminal disrepair. Vandals had broken every window, removed the doors with crowbars, smashed roofs, ripped away guttering and lit campfires in the once grand rooms. Even the *FOR SALE* sign lay trampled in the mud.

The property's ruinous condition did nothing to dampen Reg's sense that he had discovered something unique. Fascinated, he walked repeatedly through the decaying house, its gaping windows invaded by tendrils and branches thrusting from the old wild garden.

In 2005 - 50 years after that fateful visit - Reg Ryan told me, 'There was no logic in what happened from then on. I found myself making plans and thinking, *This place is going to take me years to repair.* I never had the slightest doubt that restoring the house was what I was destined to do. I could simply have shrugged and walked away that morning - but that never seemed to be an option.'

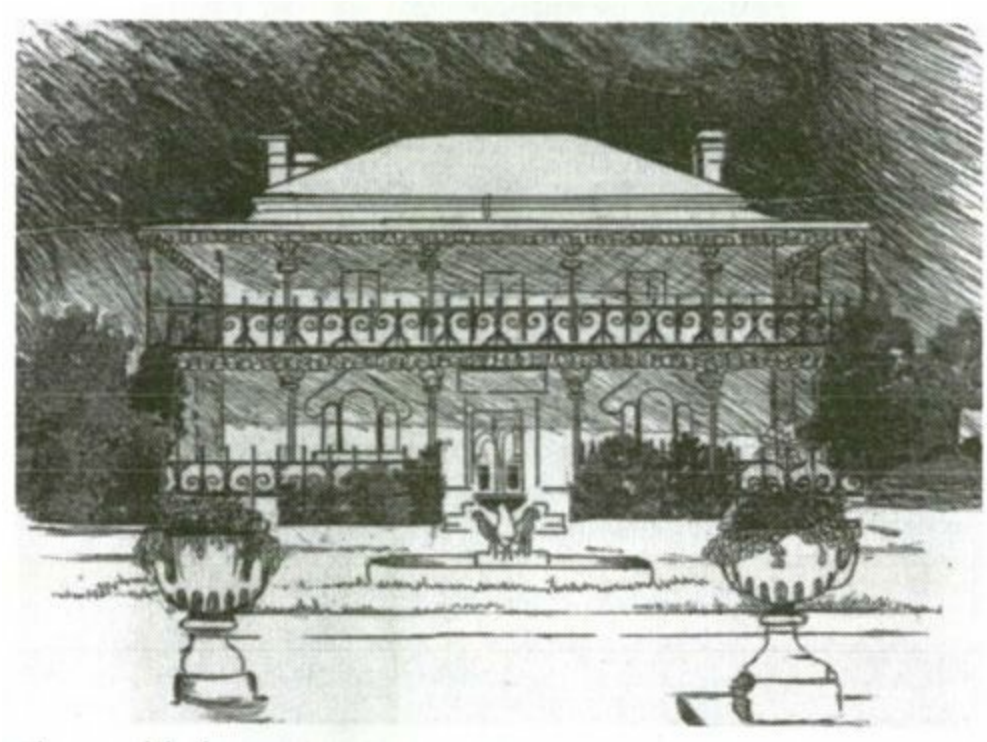
The old family home that would monopolise the rest of Reg Ryan's life had been built in the late 19th century and named Monte Cristo (Mount of Christ). Its original owners, Christopher and Elizabeth Crawley, were long dead. The surviving family's asking price was 8000 pounds ($16,000) - a sum young Reg, a tailor, could afford neither to pay, nor to borrow.

But he was undeterred. Somehow, he knew, he would make Monte Cristo his.

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS of waiting, punctuated by cruel setbacks, he succeeded. In 1957 Reg married Olive Summerell. The young woman, born in nearby Wagga Wagga, enthusiastically supported his ambitions for the

homestead. Whenever they could find time the couple climbed the hill to inspect the increasingly bleak ruin, which they already half-regarded as their own. They watched alertly as its price tag steadily decreased - until in 1959 it plunged to 2000 pounds ($4000). This was an entry fee Reg and Olive felt confident they could afford. They signed a contract of sale with Alphonse Crawley, 80-year-old son of the original owners, and immediately began to draw up a restoration plan. Everything, from the wide verandahs and opulent plaster ceilings to the roofs and stairways, would have to be repaired or completely replaced.

But happily the core edifice remained sound. The Victorian builders had painstakingly constructed the house from sandstock bricks, laid on a drystone foundation. After more than a century the plaster remained free of cracks. The solid brick walls, 45 centimetres thick, were still massively strong. Although there was a daunting amount of work to be done - at immense cost - the Ryans had the comfort of knowing they would be building on a solid foundation.



The troubled mansion Monte Cristo in Junee, NSW. ***Illustration Faith Richmond***

But just as they were about to buy their first materials they received a shock, in the form of a legal letter. There had been a misunderstanding in the contract. Unless they could afford to renegotiate they would have to

relinquish the property. Unable to take on further debt the young couple gave up the house. Disappointed, they moved to a nearby town where they set up a mixed business.

But the homestead continued to tantalise. In 1960 the Crawley estate offered it for sale again. There were no takers. The only regular visitors by that time were the vandals, whose relentless assault on the house prompted fears that they would eventually burn it down. The estate's manager hired a caretaker, Jack Simpson, to camp on the premises and fend off the attackers. It proved an impossible - and ultimately fatal - task. After 10 months in the job Simpson was shot dead by a youth who subsequently told the judge he had been inspired by Hitchcock's *Psycho.*

The caretaker position was readvertised. Unsurprisingly no one applied. The vandalism worsened. In 1963 the Crawley estate desperately offered the devastated homestead at the knockdown price of 1000 pounds ($2000). No one, aside from Reg Ryan, showed the smallest interest. He signed a second sale contract, ensuring that it was error- free this time. Soon afterward he and Olive and their three small daughters Deborah, Noelene and Michelene moved into Monte Cristo. No one had thought to tell them that the premises were haunted.

A Brilliance in the Fog

It was on 3 June 1963 that Reg and Olive first became aware something might be amiss. They had been living at the homestead for three days. Because there was neither power nor water, a relative was babysitting the children. After spending a day clearing rooms of rubble the couple drove down to the town for supplies. ‘It was very foggy that night,’ Reg recalled. *‘When we returned and came around the bottom corner of the driveway, light was streaming from every door and window.*

‘This came as such a shock that I slammed on the brakes. We sat there staring up at the house. It wasn’t just lit, it was brilliantly lit - and that’s what we couldn’t understand at all. There was no electricity connected. All we had for illumination was a single kerosene lamp - and of course we’d turned it off before going out.

‘We knew that even if someone had lit the lamp again it couldn’t possibly have created this dazzling display. Olive was scared it was burglars with powerful torches - but that couldn’t have been so, because their lights would have been throwing shadows as they moved around the rooms. The light we were looking at was solid and motionless.

‘I got out of the car, intending to walk up to the house to see what was going on. But the moment I pushed the car door shut the lights went out - and the house was in foggy darkness again.’

(In 1990, whatever agency had illuminated the homestead performed an eerie encore. The Ryans’ then 21- year-old son Lawrence had driven home, leaving the rest of the family at a ball in Wagga Wagga. As he turned into the driveway he saw - just as his parents had seen - that every room in the unoccupied homestead was ablaze with an intense brilliance, uncomfortable to his eyes. As he drove closer the light abruptly went out.)

‘We tried hard to rationalise our initial experience,’ Reg told me. ‘A few people suggested the light source might simply have been our headlights reflected in the windows. But at that time there wasn’t a single pane of glass in the whole place.’

At that busy stage in their lives the young parents had little time to puzzle over an inexplicable occurrence. They were beset by more practical problems. To enable him to begin the long task of restoring Monte Cristo 29-year-old Reg had taken out a large bank loan. He was paying the instalments,

and feeding his family, by working as a door- to-door salesman from nine to five and as a drinks waiter at night. In what he ironically described as his spare time he renovated: restoring the sweeping gardens, reflooring the balcony and verandah, fitting cast-iron railings and installing opulent doors, harvested from other mansions that had flowered and faded. On a friend's advice he eventually started a home-based antiques business, which proved so successful he was able to accelerate the restoration work.

As their house grew majestically around them the Ryans began to love Monte Cristo. But their happiness was flawed by a series of sinister events. 'Every pet we brought to the place reacted violently,' Reg said. 'The first indication came from our cat Blackie, who we brought over from Wagga on the first weekend. The minute I put him down on the floor his hackles rose and he went berserk. When he couldn't find a ground floor exit he raced up the side of the broken stairway, jumped off the second floor balcony and bolted. We never saw him again.

'We couldn't work out what had upset him. It was only a few days later, when we talked about it to some locals in Junee, that we learned our place was reputedly haunted. We hadn't seen any ghosts yet, but as time went by we didn't find the stories all that hard to believe. Our beautiful little Australian terrier (misnamed Scottie) suffered much the same fate as our cat, going crazy when we released him into the house. He could feel something in there - we knew that just by looking at him. He found a downstairs door to escape through, then disappeared, just like Blackie.

Kittens, Birds Died

‘It was three years before we could keep a pet. “Miss P.” was the first cat that actually agreed to stay around - but never in - the house. Originally I’d found her crying in a paddock, caught in a rabbit trap set by one of the local boys. I managed to bandage her injured paw, but she refused to enter the homestead with me. She insisted ever after that the children feed her outside. A few months on she had a litter of kittens in one of the old sheds and the children delighted in visiting them. But to the whole family’s dismay, every one of those kittens, at a few weeks old, would froth at the mouth and die.

‘One kitten defied the trend and survived to the age of about five months. We kept her inside to look after her better. Then one morning Olive made a shocking discovery. Coming down to start breakfast she found the kitten dead, with its stomach opened … a bizarre happening we’ve never been able to explain. The house had been completely locked from inside.’

The kittens were not the only creatures to perish. Determined to start making practical use of the hectare on which the homestead stood, Reg Ryan built a fowlhouse. The resident hens laid no eggs - and after several days began to die off. Reg bought more hens, protecting them behind a tall wire-netting fence with a padlocked gate. To keep aerial predators out, he added a strong wire roof. Three days after finishing the job, he found all the birds dead, their necks wrung. Also strangled was the family’s pet parrot, which had been locked into the enclosure for safety. The wire fence and roof were intact - and the padlock had not been tampered with.

As the children grew, the deaths continued. On her 16th birthday Deborah’s boyfriend gave her a pair of finches. She kept them in a small cage in her second floor bedroom and scrupulously watered and fed them. ‘One day she came home for lunch and went straight up to check the birds,’ Reg said. ‘As usual they were active and chirpy. She came straight down to the kitchen, ran some fresh water for them and went back up - all in a matter of one or two minutes. When she stepped into her room, both birds lay dead on the cage floor. The pet shop people had no answers as to how or why they’d died.’

Throughout their childhood the sisters became accustomed to mysterious events. For several years Deborah and Noelene shared an upstairs room. It had no verandah - only a blank wall dropping away to the ground far

below. Often they would summon their parents to complain that ‘the man’ had returned. They described the apparition as the head of a young male, the shoulders only partly visible. He appeared to be wearing a farmer’s work clothes - and would, quite impossibly, float outside their window, staring in.

So many visitors, ranging from antique shop customers to tradesmen, made similar complaints that the Ryans finally - albeit unwillingly - accepted that they were the owners of an extremely haunted house. Unlike their daughters neither Reg nor Olive ever saw an entity, but they ‘felt’ and ‘sensed’ foreign presences quite regularly. And both were well aware of the powerful physical effect certain parts of the homestead could have on outsiders. One afternoon a woman and her daughter became ‘stuck’ on the stairs. They were unable to move, either up or down - saying they could feel an invisible force impeding their progress. Parapsychologists who later studied the dark history of the house would confirm a witness account that a small child, torn from her nanny’s arms, had violently died in the stairwell. The infant’s spirit had lingered on the landing ever since. Other visitors to the homestead have described being followed through the grand rooms by a bearded man in a brown suit. This entity is thought to be the ghost of Thomas Crawley, the original owner. The soft notes of a piano sometimes issue from an upstairs room in which there has been no piano since 1948.

Reports of Monte Cristo’s phantoms, and their extraordinary interactions with present-day people, began to circulate widely in Junee. As with many other Australian provincial mysteries, these stories were seldom heard beyond the district’s borders. However, all this changed in 1977 when an ABC rural journalist heard about Mr Crawley’s ghost and tipped off a producer with the ABC series *A Big Country.* A film crew, accompanied by three self-described mediums, descended on the homestead.

Standing at the door of a spare bedroom one of the mediums, Van Berk, said he could see an elderly woman dressed entirely in black. A silver cross was hanging on the wall behind her. Berk was then filmed in the stables, from which he ran, coughing and choking, saying that he could smell death. Months later these impressions would prove to have been remarkably accurate.

Another of the mediums, Liz James, said she could sense ‘death and tragedy’ on the stairs. When the program went to air an 86-year-old Cootamundra viewer, Mrs Babcock, wrote in to offer more detail. She said that her mother (under the maiden name, Cupee) had worked as a maid at

Monte Cristo between 1907 and 1911. One of the nannies had dropped a little girl to her death down the stairwell.

A distraught servant claimed at the time that *'something'* had wrenched the child from her arms. Analysts have since speculated that such deadly attacks, along with the slaughter of birds and animals, could be the work of a single disturbed spirit: the phantom of a mentally deranged man, son of the housekeeper, who was imprisoned in a small room at the homestead for more than 40 years. There is still a hole in the wall, worn away by his chains. When the captive's mother died, other staff members forgot to feed him. He was eventually found dying, crouched in the fetal position. Hair long and matted, and fingernails growing back into the palms of his hands, he had eaten everything he could find - leaving only the few pitiful crusts that lay beyond his reach.

Particularly disturbing to the ABC film crew was the incident of the looping smoke. The director was shooting a sequence in the brightly floodlit dairy. At the same time, to offset the chill of the country evening, the Ryans built a fire in their dining room fireplace. To the astonishment of witnesses the smoke emerged from the second-storey chimney, curled neatly in the air and (as if sucked) flowed straight down the chimney attached to the dairy.

Several weeks after the *Big Country* episode was televised the housemaid's daughter, Mrs Babcock, revisited Monte Cristo, which she had not seen since she was a child. She showed the Ryan family the original room in which the piano had stood - an instrument all the Crowley children had played. This is the same room from which the sound of piano music still reportedly emerges today.

The elderly lady then climbed to the spare bedroom in which Van Berk claimed to have seen a cross affixed to the wall, with a woman in black standing near it. When she was a girl, said Mrs Babcock, this had been a box room. But in 1910, when the original owner Thomas Crawley died, his widow transformed it into a chapel. The local Catholic priest visited twice a week to pray with Mrs Crawley, who dressed at all times in black.

Perhaps the most dramatic confirmation of Van Berk's abilities came toward the end of Mrs Babcock's visit. While passing the stables - from which the medium had run, saying he could smell death - the old lady recalled that in the early 20th century a stableboy named Morris had woken extremely ill and unable to rise from bed. The foreman, convinced the boy was a malingerer, 'taught him a lesson' by setting fire to his straw mattress.

The boy burned to death.

Police laid no charges, describing the occurrence as a ‘tragic accident’. Visitors to the stables have since reported hearing their names called - and turning to see the figure of a 10- to 12-year-old boy fading into the brickwork.

The TV report changed Monte Cristo’s destiny. No longer an obscure rural antique shop and museum it became a focus not only for the curious but for investigators of the paranormal from around the world. Many camera-equipped visitors have managed to capture bizarre images (see photo supplement). No one has been able to estimate the sheer *number* of entities that inhabit the house - or explain why they have chosen this particular place to manifest themselves. One English observer wondered whether the homestead might be standing on a ley-line of the kind associated, in Europe, with uncanny phenomena. Other theorists suggest that the Crawleys, having become ghosts themselves, evolved in some way into a magnet for other spirits.

In 1997 the Ryans received an Australia Day award - not for their homestead’s phantoms but for their prodigious efforts, against crushing odds, in restoring the historic homestead and its gardens.

‘I’m comfortable with Monte Cristo’s ghosts,’ Reg told me. ‘But Olive tends to get upset by them. I know that if I died tomorrow she’d be out of here the next minute. But it’s always been a bit different for me. The day I first saw this place I knew without a doubt I’d live here one day. I truly believe that something supernatural led me to this homestead - and that somehow I was meant to be the guardian, keeper and protector of this piece of Australian history that was so nearly lost.’

The Making of a Haunted House

In 1876 Christopher Crawley, a struggling 35-year-old farmer, bought 210 hectares of land in Junee, New South Wales. He and his wife Elizabeth built a small brick cottage on the site (now known as the Original Homestead).

Hearing rumours that the Great Southern Railway Line might eventually pass through Junee, Crawley strategically bought as many parcels of land as his bankers would allow. He also built a hotel opposite the site mooted to become the new railway station. Crawley's foresight and financial daring eventually made him one of the colony's richest men.

In 1884 he built a grand homestead in front of the original cottage, which was then converted into servants' quarters, flanked by stables and a dairy. The couple called the new house Monte Cristo (Mount of Christ) and raised seven children there. The Crawleys were lauded for their philanthropy - but dark stories were told about the unhappy lives of their employees. Mrs Crawley, who in photographs resembles Queen Victoria, is said to have ruled the household harshly. Many witnesses claim to have seen - and felt - her ghost in the present-day homestead. The phantoms of household staff - and of other personalities, so far unidentified by historians, are also said to haunt the premises.

But even in Monte Cristo's earliest days there were reports, and in one case apparent photographic evidence, of ghosts. An intriguing picture taken when the homestead was newly built, shows a strange black figure peering from a window. The figure occupies a position where nobody - thanks to wooden blinds and heavy drapes - could arguably have stood.

At age 69 Christopher Crawley fell mortally ill. The family physician diagnosed blood poisoning caused by a starched collar rubbing against an inflamed carbuncle. Crawley died of heart failure on 14 December 1910 - and has since reportedly been seen roaming the homestead's rooms.

In the remaining 23 years of her life Mrs Crawley is believed to have left the house only twice. She devoted herself to the Bible and had a box room converted into a chapel in which she and a priest regularly prayed. Elizabeth Crawley died of heart failure on 12 August 1933, aged 92. Monte Cristo remained the Crawleys' family home until 1948, when the last member left.

Vandalised and in ruins it was acquired by Reg and Olive Ryan in 1963. For 15 bleak years Monte Cristo had lain empty. Except for its ghosts.

Strangled Spectre used a Secret Door

The phantom of a theological student who hanged himself in 1930 plagued the premises of a South Australian film and TV production company during the 1980s. Workers at Pepper Studios, housed in an old mansion in Kent Town, insisted that the shadowy intruder habitually emerged from only one spot: behind the multi-track recording machine.

Al Clausen, the firm's managing director, told me he had seen the entity several times. 'It's a short black shadowy figure wearing a dark gown,' he said. 'Usually it appears late at night. Some of us suspect it's been responsible for interfering with the infra- red alarm system - and also for snapping lights on and off when no one's around.'

The building was used in the early 20th century as a Bible college.

Studio owner Max Pepper said, 'The ghost has given many of our staff members a jolt. Most of the witnesses say it's a young man, wearing some kind of black shroud. I had so many reports that the figure had emerged from behind the recording machine that I finally asked a local Methodist minister to do some research.

'The results were fascinating. The minister showed us old plans which indicate there's a bricked-up door in the wall behind the machine. That, as it turned out, used to be the front door of the old theological college.

'The legend is that a 1 7-year-old student hanged himself there in 1930. Despite all the architectural additions and alterations he's haunted the place ever since.'

The complex's resident spirit was generally believed to belong to a student priest, tortured by sexual problems, whose body was found swinging from a dressing gown cord.

A visiting New Zealand clergyman, Bill Subritzky, offered to exorcise the apparition. The directors politely declined the offer. 'I wouldn't have a bar of it,' Al Clausen said firmly. 'The ghost has never done an ounce of harm, even though he chills people a bit, especially when he makes the lights behave erratically where he had his cell. This is his home - and we're happy to co-exist.'

Haunted Cinemas

Phantoms in the Front Stalls

When Jeff Jacklin joined Melbourne's historic Classic Cinema as technical manager he little imagined that seven ghosts would be numbered among his workmates. The resident wraiths' alarming behaviour sometimes made it impossible for Jeff and his colleagues to perform their duties. In the 1990s, massive renovations transformed the old building into a modern multi-screen complex - prompting staff to speculate that the changes might drive the entities away. But it was a forlorn hope. In 2005, the phantoms' paranormal pranks were persisting unchecked…

ON A RAINSWEPT JULY NIGHT in 1999, Jeff Jacklin was working late and alone. As technical manager of the Classic Cinema in the Melbourne suburb of Elsternwick he had supervised the evening's final screening and was sitting now at a bench near the projection booth, checking his staff's timesheets. The chore complete, he carried the paperwork down to complex manager Ruth's office on the floor below.

Ruth's working-space lay locked and in darkness. Like everyone else she had gone home.

Jeff Jacklin told me, 'I knelt down and pushed the first of the sheets under the door, for next day. Immediately I got a shock. *Someone on the other side of the door was pulling at the paper*. I let go as if I'd touched hot metal, and stood up. The paper remained halfway under the door, which convinced me I must have imagined what just happened. I bent to retrieve the timesheet - and something pulled at it again. The tug felt tremendously strong, like some kind of magnetism. I turned and ran. It wasn't the first time I'd reacted in that way, inside that building.'

From his earliest nights in the job Jeff had experienced a long series of incomprehensible incidents.

'The first thing that happened was when I was sitting in the booth in the empty building,' he recalled. 'Suddenly phones started ringing in the office area. I went in to check but no one was at the other end.

'Often, when I was sitting in that projection booth, the hair on the back of my neck would start to rise. I'd sense that something was watching - and then, on several occasions, the door would open and close of its own accord, with no draughts anywhere.

'One night, walking through the half-darkened cinema, I heard loud tapping noises all around me. The noise was coming from the plastic cupholder rests. On another night I sat at a bench upstairs to eat a few sandwiches. There was nowhere to put the Coke bottle so I placed it on the floor. While I was eating, it fell over. I set it right and it immediately fell again. While I was retrieving the bottle a second time, the handle on the rewind bench behind me started turning. I got out of there.'

So many staff members complained about the jarring phenomena that the cinema's owner Eddie Tamur sought advice from a clairvoyant.

'She told us there were quite a number of spirits in the building,' Jeff

recalled. ‘That was news to several of us, who’d assumed there was only one. The medium said that among them she could perceive a small man dressed in a suit from the 1930s. She sensed he’d been a regular patron of the cinema in his lifetime and had loved the experience so much he was continually drawn back. He played pranks because he was isolated and starved of company. His tricks, sometimes frightening to us, were just his way of trying to communicate. The medium advised us not to be hostile, but to speak aloud to him and say we were happy to have him around, provided he stopped interrupting us. Next time something odd happened I did exactly that - and it seemed to work, up to a point.’

A second clairvoyant, who visited the cinema soon afterward, announced that ‘a small crowd of ghosts’ (at least seven and possibly as many as 14) had made their home on the premises. One of the entities, she said, was ‘a woman named Sharon’, whose name she could hear echoing around the oldest cinema in the complex.

A Melbourne bookshop owner and student of the supernatural, Drew Sinton decided to check whether a ‘Sharon’ had ever been mentioned in the cinema’s written history. He found no one of that name. But he did ascertain that soon after its completion in 1886, a section of the building had been used as a dance hall. Its name was the Sharon.

The Classic has been screening films since the early days of silent pictures - and is generally thought to have been haunted for more than a century, with succeeding generations of managers and staff rediscovering the resident spirits for themselves.

Ticketseller and longtime staff member Delyce Litchfield reported several brushes with the unknown. ‘Quite a few times I’ve strongly sensed I was being watched from the stairs,’ she said. ‘And other people here have heard their names being called when no one was around.’ But trainees and other new employees have traditionally endured the most startling experiences. ‘They used to come to me white- faced, complaining about knockings and rattlings and equipment disappearing or being moved,’ Jeff Jacklin said. ‘But now I warn every new worker that strange things might happen. It blunts the shock for them.’

During its 119 years, the Classic building has served as everything from a community hall and dance academy to a live theatre and skating rink. Many witnesses have agreed that dancers and the distant sounds of their music are prominently involved in the haunting. The entities seem uninterested in the

improvements the new owners have made to the premises.

Nothing beyond the ordinary is reported from the four new cinemas, with their CD listening posts and infrared headsets. The ghosts confine themselves to the old original cinema with its big stage, and to the site of the first projection area. Having established their boundaries decades ago, the phantoms seem never to venture beyond them.

Dead Projectionist Was ‘Bathed in Blue Light’

The Classic is not the only Australian cinema in which bizarre events have reportedly occurred. In 1982 the old Metro in Malvern, Victoria, was plagued by paranormal occurrences that shook employees and filmgoers.

John McKenzie, then chief executive of the Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association, told me, ‘A ghost has appeared frequently in this cinema. Staff have described the figure as being dark-suited, balding and in his late 60s. They say he was unmistakably recognisable as a projectionist employed here from 1922 until his death in 1963. I worked with this man for many years. I’ve never seen his apparition, but several times I’ve felt a presence very powerfully in the projection room.’

Russell O’Reagan, who projected hundreds of movies in the cavernous 1920-vintage theatre, said, ‘We all became used to the ghost, but it never lost the ability to startle us. One of our cleaners brought her four-year-old daughter in, early one morning. The little girl went to one of the toilets, but immediately ran out, shouting, “There’s a man in there…he said good morning.” Her mother dashed into the toilet, and saw nothing. But later on she spotted the phantom herself.

‘On one occasion, early in the morning, she caught sight of a well-dressed man, bathed in a strange blue light, standing in the upstairs circle. Another time, while walking through the empty upstairs foyer, she nearly died of fright when she saw a face - and nothing more - floating outside the manager’s office.

‘I believe I’ve seen the apparition too - but only out of the corner of my eye. One morning I was standing by the projection porthole, getting ready to change reels, when I heard footsteps coming up the stairs. Someone appeared in the doorway - I assumed it might be a colleague - but when I turned around a split second later, no one was there.’

Martin Evans, the Metro’s manager, told me, ‘I never saw the ghost, but a considerable number of people came in to report it. And there were numerous descriptions of strange things happening.’

Russell O’Reagan recalled, ‘Everyone became stressed out by what

seemed some kind of deliberate campaign. We'd find phones impossibly removed from their hooks in locked rooms - and sometimes the sound volume of movies would be abruptly turned down. On one occasion, after an exhaustive search for lenses that had vanished, we found them neatly stacked under the stage. Some of the staff blamed the ghost for that.

'But my weirdest experience came when I was working back one night. Suddenly a massive pounding sound thundered up from the foyer - just as if someone with heavy boots was stamping on the floor. But that couldn't have been so, because except for me the cinema was empty.'

John McKenzie commented, 'Few people working here had much doubt that the ghost was our old projectionist. People were scared by the apparition at first - but they agreed in the end that it was pretty harmless. The projectionist had been a very likeable man. He retired after more than 40 years in this job, then took his wife on an overseas trip. She fell ill and they had to return. She died several weeks later.

'When the projectionist died soon after, we were all certain it was of a broken heart.'

Adelaide's Film-Fan Phantom

During the 1980s an entity that glided through the stalls and melted into walls became an almost familiar sight to staff at an old seaside cinema in Adelaide. One witness to the haunting was projectionist Darrell Pick of Morphett Vale, South Australia. He told me:

> *'Throughout the time I worked at the Village in Glenelg the ghost appeared more times than I can remember. Everyone believed he was one of the people who'd founded the cinema back in 1940 when it was called the Seaview. We all got the impression that he was principally interested in the financial side of our activities, because he'd always appear just before we put on a successful show.*
>
> *'We saw him when we were about to screen such films as* Up Pompeii, Bedroom Mazurka *and* Blue Water, White Death. *Eventually we began to regard his advent as a reliable signal that a particular movie would do well with our local audience. The first time I saw the apparition was when I let myself into the empty cinema one Sunday morning. I was a movie fanatic and I liked to go in just to throw the lights on and pull back the curtains.*
>
> *'On that morning I noticed an elderly, dark-suited man with thick grey hair standing in the stalls. He was looking up at me in the projection room with an enquiring expression on his face. Knowing the cinema was supposed to be shut I yelled out, "Hey! What are you doing here?" He turned, glided away and vanished through a wall, leaving me thunderstruck. Next day I told the manager and cashier what had happened. They responded calmly, saying that the ghost had been around for years. He dated back to the time when the old cinema's ceiling twinkled with stars and the walls were latticed with roses and decorated with paintings of the Nile.*
>
> *'After that encounter I saw the old bloke quite often. Sometimes he'd come into the projection room and stand behind me. I'd always be too scared to turn around, but I'd glimpse his reflection in the porthole glass.*
>
> *It took me quite a while to get used to these visits. But my co-*

workers (along with the ghost himself) finally convinced me he was harmless and not to be feared. It was obvious to everyone that all he cared about was the shows we were putting on. Movies were his life… even after death.'

Fear - in Australia’s Film Museum

For more than a decade, employees of the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra campaigned to be moved to new premises. The building in which they were obliged to work, they complained, was a threat to health. And to add to a bad bargain, it was unpleasantly haunted.

The old edifice which housed much of the nation’s film heritage had been jointly occupied until 1984 by the Australian Institute of Anatomy and the Canberra morgue. Legions of the city’s dead were briefly accommodated within the building’s walls, before moving on to the crematorium or the grave. A more permanent presence was Sir Colin McKenzie’s internationally renowned collection of human organs, all preserved in formaldehyde. To intensify the general atmosphere of the tomb, the sculpted heads of 10 distinguished and long-dead medical scientists still looked down onto the foyer. The faces on several of these sculptures had been taken directly from death masks. And then there were the remains of Aborigines, profanely disinterred by 19th century archaeologists and stored in the basement…

So heavily haunted were the premises that sceptics were unusually thin on the ground. Ken Rowland, manager of the printing laboratory, was one of an estimated 60 ghost-witnesses who had no hesitation in speaking out. ‘People working at their computers will sometimes feel a light brushing on the back of the neck, or a pressure on the shoulder,’ he said. ‘Occasionally you’ll see a reflection of someone in your screen, but when you turn around, nobody’s there.’

Some of the archive’s employees said they had seen the transparent figures of women on a balcony and in the library. On 1 June 1997 Dr Jeff Brownrigg told *Sunday Age* journalist Peter Cotton that after finishing work one night he turned a corner into a corridor and saw something astonishing. Directly in his path stood a crowd of people wearing fashions of the 19th century. ‘They seemed to have a sepia quality,’ he said. ‘The closest was a tall man with a bowler hat, wing collar and Zapata moustache. I got such a shock that I stepped back into the stairwell. When I entered the corridor again the crowd was gone.’

Next day Dr Brownrigg described his bizarre experience to colleagues, who told him they too had encountered phantoms in the archive - some

events being simultaneously witnessed by up to five people. But despite his experience Jeff Brownrigg still disbelieved in ghosts.

‘Some of us here have just seen things we can’t explain,’ he said.

The phantoms were also sensed by a robot. The archive’s electronic monitoring device, programmed to register each visitor, regularly recorded the entry of two additional ‘people’ every night. As they stepped through the electronic beams the intruder alarms remained silent and the locks on the doors undisturbed.

In 1998 the Film Archive’s relieved employees said goodbye to their ghosts and moved into a new building.

Invisible Assailants

Chilling Case of the Priests and the Poltergeist

For five disturbing months in 1998 a violent poltergeist wrought havoc in a house in Humpty Doo, south of Darwin. Priests called to exorcise the angry spirit had Bibles snatched from their hands and pages torn loose. One priest's arm was painfully twisted. Newspapers published theories about what was 'really' happening. But the five people who shared the premises had their own instincts about the haunting's possible cause…

ABC RADIO REPORTER TRACEY FARRAR described it as the strangest experience of her life. It began on one of her rostered days off in April 1998 when she sat on a Darwin beach collecting small brown shells. She little imagined that within 24 hours those shells would assume a breathtaking significance.

The following day Tracey reported for work. She was assigned to cover an unusual story: the haunting of a house in the Northern Territory town of Humpty Doo. Like most journalists she had limited knowledge of ghosts. But she was keeping a determinedly open mind when she arrived at the McMinns Drive bungalow, painted egg-blue and standing behind a high cyclone fence. The two-hectare property was richly planted with mango trees, which toward Christmas would again grow heavy with lush red and orange fruit. Beneath the fierce sky a blue swimming pool sparkled in the sun.

But the property's peaceful atmosphere was deceptive. For the past week the five distraught tenants had been complaining that 'some kind of ghost' was running riot among them. Journalists from the local *Northern Territory News* and *Litchfield Times* had gone in prepared for a hoax, but emerged shaken. Something beyond reason and everyday belief was unarguably occurring behind the walls of the modest residence. Pebbles, knives, scissors, shards of broken glass and other objects of unknown origin were sporadically flying through the rooms 24 hours a day - punctuating the daylight hours with sudden shocks, and making sleep virtually impossible.

On the floors and scattered on the ground outside, words arranged from Scrabble tiles were continually appearing - spelling out such 'messages' as HELP, SKIN, CAR, FIRE, TROY and many more. Two months earlier a young man named Troy - a friend of household members - had died in an inferno when a paint thinner-laden utility in which he had been travelling crashed into a tree.

Tenants of the blighted bungalow were Dave Clarke, his partner Jill Summerville, a friend who preferred to be known merely as Murph, and three more recent arrivals - Andrew and Kirstie Agius and their baby Jasmine, aged 11 months. All, except for the infant, were gainfully employed working people saving for homes of their own. None had endured a crisis of this kind before.

The story took a momentous turn for ABC reporter Tracey Farrar when

she sat at a table to interview Kirstie Agius. First, Tracey received a painful and unprecedented shock from her microphone - after which an object of unknown origin suddenly clattered down in front of her. She picked the thing up. It looked familiar. Then she recognised it. *It was a small brown shell of precisely the type she had been collecting at the beach the previous day.*

It is not uncommon in poltergeist hauntings for an individual to receive 'personal attention' of this kind.

As interest in their bizarre predicament grew the household's five residents were increasingly exasperated to be receiving calls not just from around Australia but from the United States, Britain and Scandinavia. 'All we want,' Murph told an enquirer, 'is for the bloody thing to f*** off.' But it didn't - and the visitors kept arriving.

One reporter, Nikki Voss *of the Northern Territory News*, recalled that she and her photographer had approached the house in a state of 'extreme scepticism'. But - as with everyone else who crossed the threshold - their cynicism quickly crumbled. Soon after Nikki and her colleague stepped into the kitchen they were obliged to duck as a beer mug shot 'with astonishing accuracy' through a small hole in a windowpane. Later, while they were standing in another room with their backs to a solid windowless wall, a fusillade of small objects struck them painfully on the backs of their necks. The material turned out to be gravel.

Sceptics, hungry for evidence of a hoax, could find nothing - which was not surprising because few could summon the energy to actually conduct a first-hand invest- igation. The loudest critics preferred (characteristically) to pontificate from a distance of several thousand kilometres. One inventive rationalist suggested that the tenants might be loading the blades of the ceiling fans with sharp knives, broken glass and stones - then launching the dangerous cargo with the flick of a switch. Kirstie Agius mildly remonstrated that she was worried enough about her baby daughter's safety without allowing such potentially deadly pranks to be played.

Conclusive pictorial evidence proved difficult to come by. As in the case of Britain's Enfield Poltergeist (see panel) the entity declined to cooperate with cameramen - even attempting violently to disable and sabotage their equipment. When the Seven Network's 'Today Tonight' program dispatched a team headed by journalist Greg Quail they filmed results that were occasionally dramatic, but analysed on an incident-by-incident basis, open to argument. The ghost (if it was a ghost) gave the production group a chilly

reception. On the bathroom floor they found fresh arrangements of Scrabble tiles bearing the messages GO and NO TV The following day the latter message had changed to NO CAMERA.

Channel 7's crew - along with numerous witnesses including three priests - found themselves confronted every few hours by the unbelievable:

- A pair of scissors plunging into the pool
- A bullet 'from nowhere' slamming onto a kitchen table
- A steak knife plunging onto a cameraman's hire car
- Bedding hurled against a wall
- A spanner crashing into a kitchen cupboard with such force that it rocked a film camera

But when the crew captured such incidents on film and videotape the resulting footage always contained elements of doubt. 'We're all seeing it,' said a crewman, 'but it's like we're being deliberately blocked.'

Newspaperman Max Anderson was yet another journalist who arrived as an unbeliever and was subsequently obliged to accept the evidence of his eyes. In *The Australian* of 9 May 1998 he described how he had watched knives, glass and a bullet hurtling through the house at moments (seemingly chosen with exquisite timing) when cameras were pointing elsewhere or when their view was blocked. This finally prompted a frustrated cameraman to ask the ghost to cooperate for once. Which it did, in a taunting fashion. Anderson wrote:

> *The cameraman called out again, 'At least show us on camera so we can go!' Within minutes the crew had an incident on three cameras: a baby's bottle toppling from a microwave. But conclusive evidence? On tape, Dave's leg occludes a clear shot the second the bottle leaves the oven, throwing the incident open to question. The timing is not just excellent; it's genius.*

On 6 April the *Northern Territory News* published an interview with the house's previous owner who opined that the poltergeist must be his own 'unconscious energy' at work. A bank had forced him and his family off the property - and his feelings of anger were now taking paranormal form.

Back at the house the entity was becoming increasingly assertive. On one astonishing occasion two Scrabble tiles fell, seemingly from the direction

of the ceiling, and perched themselves precisely on top of a sound recordist's fluffy microphone. The tiles formed the word GO. The 'Today Tonight' crew obliged. (They had been planning, anyway, to return to Sydney that day.) The network commissioned a local freelance cameraman to take additional shots. To the frustration of the departed crew he managed, in his first hours on the job, to film mysteriously flying crockery. Greg Quail was excited at first, but ultimately rejected the footage because it could not be checked against other camera angles.

During this period the bungalow's five residents were confronted not only by a ghost, but by the landlord's lawyer. They appeared in a Darwin court to fight an eviction notice which accused them of damaging the property. Their solicitor - aptly named Kelvin Strange - protested that his clients had broken nothing. They were sincerely convinced that an unruly spirit had caused any small damage that had been done. The magistrate ruled in the tenants' favour. They could stay.

Toward the end of April 1998 the Seven Network televised episode one of its investigation, in which Greg Quail asserted that he had seen a poltergeist in action. The program attracted a huge audience. But after a tape editor noticed a momentarily reflected image of someone apparently throwing an object over a cameraman's head, the network abruptly changed course. Nervous executives decreed that the entire Humpty Doo affair must be a hoax. They thus placed two seconds of inconclusive videotape against the testimony of their own reporter, his entire crew and countless independent witnesses including three priests and journalists from rival media organisations. They also ignored a mass of indicative evidence in the form of extensive footage showing mayhem everywhere on the premises. Although none of these sequences, seen individually, was flatly conclusive, the sheer *aggregation* of activity in the house offered proof of a different kind. It was obvious that no person or persons could have 'caused' such a quantity of glass, knives, batteries and pebbles to fly without the ubiquitous cameras catching them at it.

Meanwhile, back in McMinns Drive, the disturbance continued. Independent investigators and reporters continued to visit the house, generally concluding that the phenomena were too overwhelmingly plentiful for deception to be possible. Father Tom English recalled on ABC Radio Darwin how the tenants, frightened by the sudden appearance of a large cross and trident formed in pebbles, had asked him for help. While blessing the

house he was startled by an object (provenance unknown) which slammed down on to a steel table. It was a .44 magnum bullet. When he began to sprinkle holy water a medicine bottle exploded into view and smashed against a wall. ‘Something’ then wrenched Father English’s crucifix and Bible from his hands, sending them flying across the room. When he retrieved the Bible he found that several pages had been torn loose.

Two fellow-priests said they had had similar experiences in the house. One, from the Greek Orthodox Church, set up an altar on the kitchen table. As he knelt to pray the presence snatched a large book from his hands, then twisted an arm painfully behind his back.

In May, less than a month after their eviction notice was overturned, Dave, Jill, Murph, Andrew and Kirstie decided they had had more than enough. Accompanied by baby Jasmine they quit McMinns Drive for good. The following February the owners renovated the house, adding a second storey. The ghost, they assured all who asked, was gone.

Famous London Haunting Mirrored Humpty Doo

The Humpty Doo poltergeist was not the first entity to show violent antipathy toward cameras and recording equipment.

The widely reported haunting of a council house in the London suburb of Enfield bore many resemblances to the Northern Territory case.

The trouble began in August 1977 when the children of divorcee Peggy Harper complained that their beds had begun to ‘jolt up and down’ in the night. The following day the family watched chairs moving and a heavy chest of drawers shifting of its own volition across the floor. The frightened family called police. Two constables testified that while standing in a room whose door and window were closed, they were struck by flying marbles that ‘felt hot on the skin of our hands’.

The manifestations created unprecedented interest. Investigators Maurice Grosse and Guy Playfair from Britain’s Society for Psychical Research believed the poltergeist was intelligent - and conducted tests to prove it. At one stage Grosse asked the entity, ‘How many years have you lived here?’ The purported ghost rapped 53 times in reply.

A BBC crew surmounted immense technical problems to produce a documentary on the entity. They not only recorded its rappings, but interviewed teenage daughters Janet and Margaret when they began, in a trancelike state, to speak in ‘impossibly deep’ male voices. *Daily Mirror* photographer Graham Morris spent eight months at the council house, trying desperately to obtain pictures of the phenomena that exploded daily around a trail of visitors. He had considerably less luck that Channel 7’s Humpty Doo crew would experience 21 years later. Despite the Darwin poltergeist’s hostility toward them the Australians at least managed to produce large volumes of footage - inconclusive though it was deemed to be. Inside the Enfield house, recording equipment and cameras were endlessly sabotaged.

- Despite constant replacements the *Daily Mirror’s* cameras malfunctioned 100 per cent. Batteries lost their charges immediately the flash operated.

- Engineers from Pye Business Communications placed three videorecorders in a room, hoping to capture events automatically. The

BBC reported that all lights on the recorders came on one after the other - ‘a technical impossibility’. When the engineers checked the machines next morning they found that all three tapes had ejected. They were blank.

- Radio journalists who recorded interviews in the house found either that their tapes had been erased or metal inside their machines was bent out of shape.

After several months of investigation the SPR’s Grosse and Playfair announced that the house was haunted by a ‘classic poltergeist’. The focus - or unconscious cause - of its activities was likely to be sisters Janet and Margaret. Both had entered puberty - a time when poltergeists operate.

A Packhorse Panicked, by Floating Stones

The house in Humpty Doo was not the first Australian residence to be plagued by a poltergeist. In New South Wales on 11 March 1887 the *Kiama Independent and Shoalhaven Advertiser* (with acknowledgement to the *Mudgee Independent)* reported that the Lang family, in the vicinity of Cooyal, was being troubled by gravity-defying stones.

The newspaper said:

According to the family the stones fall through the roof or float through the air without the slightest warning. Mrs Lang said that when a stone fell on the floor, it fell with a dull thud and appeared to be black in colour.

When asked if the stones had ever hit anyone she replied that some of her children had been struck, but never very hard. They described it as being as if a small bag of feathers had struck them.

On the first evening Mr Lang was returning home with a bag of flour on a pack horse. On approaching the house the animal showed reluctance to proceed further. On being unpacked he immediately bolted.

At that moment the stones started to fall for the first time. During the evening and on each successive evening from 5 o'clock until 9 or 10 o'clock the stones continued to fall. On several occasions they floated into the house, sometimes in a diagonal position; at other times horizontally.

One evening a flat stone floated in at the door, struck a kerosene lamp on a table, turned, and knocked against half a dozen plates, causing them to roll to the floor. Fortunately nothing was broken. The stones, although not seen by the reporter, were said to be about 5 inches in diameter, nearly circular in shape and flat.

The Grim Ghost of Guyra

Late on the night of 8 April 1921[*] an aggressive poltergeist launched the first of many attacks on a modest weatherboard cottage near Guyra, New South Wales. The four-roomed house, owned by council ganger William Bowen, would soon become the most infamous residence in Australia, attracting investigators and mediums from around the world.

[*] Coincidentally the Humpty Doo poltergeist disturbance also began in early April, almost exactly 77 years later.

Bowen lived in the cottage with his wife and three daughters. When the rapping began the family imagined they were the victims of a practical joke. But as the blows gradually became titanic, shaking the entire structure of the cottage, they wondered, wildly, whether some large and powerful animal might be trapped within the walls.

That theory, however, failed to explain the stones which the invisible assailant soon took to throwing - so violently, and in such large quantities, that the couple feared for their children's safety.

When every pane in the cottage had been smashed - and the stones (some warm to the touch) kept flying through the gaping window frames, William Bowen rode into Guyra to seek help from the police. By the time the three local officers, accompanied by volunteers, arrived Mrs Bowen and her daughters were huddled in the front garden, shivering in the cold autumn night. All (except 12-year- old Minnie, who seemed composed) were sobbing and terrified.

The night was cloudless with a brilliant moon. No one could have approached the house unseen. The policemen and their civilian helpers, carrying lamps and torches, fanned out to search nearby bush. They found nothing. Significantly, stones continued to hurtle into the cottage throughout the hunt - an indication, everyone agreed, that the culprits were in no fear that they would be discovered.

Next the policemen checked inside the house. Curiously the focus of the onslaught seemed to be Minnie's room. Her mirror had been smashed, the walls were pitted with holes, a chair had been overturned - and the bed was littered with stones. The investigators could find no clue as to how, or why, all this had happened. After several days spent resolutely pursuing an invisible attacker, the police asked headquarters for help. Panic, they

reported, was spreading not only through Guyra but into neighbouring townships. Locals - and newspapers throughout Australia - had begun to talk about a vicious ghost. Some residents were so nervous that they slept with guns beside the bed. There had been several shooting accidents: the worst affecting a young girl, wounded in the head.

The state government sent a team of senior detectives to Guyra to find the answers that their inept country colleagues could not. But there were no answers. Despite double cordons around the Bowens' cottage, manned by shifts of volunteers, the gigantic thumpings and the rain of stones continued. One police sergeant broke under the strain. After sleepless nights standing watch inside the house and preparing traps that were never sprung he suffered what one newspaper (using imagery from the Great War) likened to 'a form of shellshock'. A subsequent generation would have recognised it as a nervous collapse.

Soon after the sergeant went away on recreational leave, a team of tradesmen travelled from the township to the crisis-wracked cottage and replaced all of the shattered window panes. To protect their handiwork they barricaded the front of the house with stout wooden shutters. The thumpings continued, but the volleys of stones stopped - temporarily.

Several days later the grateful family, accompanied by Mrs Bowen's stepson Tom Hodder, walked down to a nearby paddock, where they pitted 20 bags of potatoes. When they returned to the house they discovered that the barricade and the windows behind it had been smashed. The wooden shutters and battens lay splintered on the verandah. Beside them rested a large stone.

The *Sunday Times*, a Queensland newspaper now defunct, sent a 'Special Reporter' to cover the haunting. His article read in part:

> *There is only one topic of conversation at Guyra, a prosperous little township about 110 miles from the Queensland border. Everywhere one hears fiercely heated argument on the subject of the extraordinary happenings at Mr Bowen's cottage, about half a mile outside the township. Women and even men are frankly afraid. They sleep with loaded guns handy.*
>
> *…The attacks (by stones) always seem directed against little Minnie Bowen, a girl of about 12. She is tall, thin and dark with peculiar dark introspective eyes that never seem to miss any movement in a room. When she speaks she never smiles and seems to look beyond or through you. She has a rather uncanny aptitude for anticipating questions,*

almost before they are asked, and answering them.

…Naturally the little township buzzes with rumours. Guyra is divided into two schools of thought - those who believe in the supernatural and those who blame some criminal or joker. Plenty of people will tell you that there are ample reasons why some interested person wants to scare the Bowens away, depreciate the value of their property and so secure possession cheaply. There is a house famine at Guyra, as in Sydney.

But as for an outside agency, it is difficult to see how a man could break through a cordon of 80 well- armed people and bombard a cottage on all sides. Of the spirit idea, all that can be said is that such things have happened before. At present it is difficult to account for the rappings and thumps in any other way.

However, hard-headed men like the local lawyer and doctor reject the very idea. The doctor set an elaborate trap to catch the person responsible. He sprayed the entire walls of a sleeping room with liquorice powder, and had a deep hole cut through the shutter and curtain, all unknown to anyone in the Bowen household. The trap failed.

By now the Guyra Ghost was attracting international attention. A Mr Moors - a friend of Sherlock Holmes's creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle - visited the town with five assistants who, he claimed, were 'trained in observation and the detection of fraudulence of any kind'. Moors, owner of four plantations in Samoa, described himself as a specialist in the assessment of allegedly supernatural events. With the Bowens' consent he removed portions of the roof to create lookout posts and also set several elaborate traps. The storms of stones from the bush all around continued unabated. Although they were sitting at a roof lookout during several of these volleys neither Moors nor his assistant could determine the stones' source.

Moors and his helpers returned home, unable even to say whether the stones originated from *outside* or *inside* the cottage.

An Australian investigator, Ben Davey of Uralla, experienced a similar problem. A student of theosophy and the supernatural, he announced that he would submit the Guyra haunting 'to the acid test of spiritualism'. Accompanied by Mrs Bowman, her daughter Minnie and a local sawmiller, Richard Pearson, he sat in Minnie's bedroom and waited for something to happen. Outside, under the command of policemen, stood a cordon of 80

men. No one could possibly have approached the house undetected.

At 9 pm a heavy thumping began. ‘It sounded,’ Davey said later, ‘as though it was coming from *outside.’* But the pickets and police surrounding the house insisted that the banging came from *inside.*

Davey nevertheless proved himself superior to other investigators - by putting to William Bowen questions no one else had thought to ask. Bowen revealed that May, his wife’s daughter by a previous marriage, had died three months earlier. Davey recalled, ‘I immediately suspected that the dead girl’s spirit was trying to communicate with Minnie.

‘I said to the girl, “If the knock comes again, ask if that’s your sister May.” She replied, “I can’t speak to my sister - she’s dead.” I coaxed her, saying, “Speak dear. Even if your sister can’t reply she might knock again.”

‘I hardly spoke the words before another knock came. My hair stood on end. But I continued to coax the girl and about five minutes later we heard another knock. Minnie crossed and blessed herself and said, “If that’s you, May - speak to me.” She was silent for a few moments and then began to cry. I asked her, “Did May speak?” She said yes…and the message she had received was, “Tell mother I am perfectly happy where I am, and that your prayers when I was sick brought me here and made me happy. Tell mother not to worry. I’ll watch and guard over you all.”’

Davey left, convinced that this exchange had put the ghost to rest. He was mistaken. Within 24 hours the bangings and the fusillades of stones had resumed.

On 28 April 1921 Minnie Bowen’s parents encouraged her to quit the cottage and to move in for a while with her grandmother, Mrs Shelton, in Glen Innes. It had become clear to them that Minnie was the focus of the haunting - and that if she went away the house might be at peace again. This theory proved correct. But no one had foreseen that Minnie would *take the ghost with her.*

Ten days after her arrival at the Sheltons’ Church Street house, stones began to rattle against the roof and walls. A constable assigned to the case could find no one to arrest. He reported that while he watched, a stone had smashed a bedroom window, becoming entangled in the curtain. And the bangings, too, were back. Neighbours on both sides complained about the uncanny noise. One said that the thumps sounded like an axe striking repeatedly against his wall. A reporter with the British newspaper the *Daily Mail* wrote:

Mr Alf Shelton, the son of the house, said that some of the bumps against the dining room wall had been heavy enough to dislodge ornaments on the sideboard. He insisted that this effect could not possibly have been caused by a girl aged 12. To prove this point he recruited a friend who weighed 14 stone to throw his weight against the wall near the sideboard. The ornaments did not even shake.

The menacing phenomena continued around the clock - finally prompting Mrs Shelton to write to Minnie's parents, begging them to take their daughter home. They reluctantly obliged, whereupon the Guyra ghost performed an unpleasant encore. The family eventually became resigned to the destructive entity that noisily shared their house. As Minnie developed into womanhood the phenomena slowly ebbed, then ceased.

At 18 Minnie married a farmer named Inks. In 1989, disabled by arthritis, she tripped and fell in front of a car in Armidale, New South Wales, dying in hospital shortly afterward. As the scientific study of hauntings reached a more advanced stage she was often identified as having possibly been a classic 'poltergeist medium' - an adolescent whose troubled emotions create physical effects around them. The proponents of this theory had nothing to say about the role that might have been played by Minnie's dead sister May.

The Guyra Ghost quickly faded from public memory - plunging the Bowens and their township back into the obscurity from which the ghost had plucked them. The world gave little thought to Guyra for the next 78 years - until, in 1999, an object of unknown origin plunged at colossal speed into the town's water supply reservoir. It drilled a tunnel 20 metres long, burying itself so deeply into the granite that scientists were unable to recover it.

Followed, by WA's Sinister Stones

Minnie Bowen is by no means the only person to have been pursued by flying stones. Thirty-four years after a violent entity followed Minnie from home to her grand- mother's house 60 kilometres away, a young farmworker found himself in a similarly disturbing situation.

The trouble began in June 1955. Cyril Penny was living with his pregnant wife Lorna on flax farmer Bill Hack's property in Mayanup, Western Australia. One afternoon, without warning, stones began mysteriously to fall on the farm. Ranging from pebbles to rocks that were 'quite large' the missiles first began descending on the roof of a shack occupied by a 36-year-old part-Aboriginal employee, Gilbert Smith, his wife Jean and their seven children.

The stonefall, seemingly from an empty cloudless sky, was eerily gentle. No one was struck or hurt. But the Smiths were understandably alarmed. Gilbert, who had worked for the Hack family for several years, urged his disbelieving employer to come and see the phenomenon for himself. Assuming that someone was playing a tiresome joke, Bill Hack refused. But next day the bombardment intensified. Jean Smith went to her husband's employer and begged him to visit the house. Hack relented and invited Mrs Smith to join him in his car. He would investigate right away.

The Smiths' hut stood in a clearing. As Bill Hack drove closer a large pebble suddenly struck the windscreen. In no doubt that someone had thrown the stone and run away, Hack hurriedly quit the car and strode to the back of the house. No one was in sight. As he stood bemused, another stone from nowhere glanced gently off his shoulder. Jean Smith invited him inside for a cup of tea. Things were even stranger inside the shack, she warned. And she was right. For several hours Hack sat watching stones (originating from nowhere that he could detect) floating down to the kitchen floor. The stones were warm to the touch. Some were hot.

News flashed through the district that the Smiths' house was either haunted, or under attack by a particularly resourceful prank-player.

Several nights later a crowd of neighbouring farmers and their workers - most of them armed -formed a cordon around the Smiths' shack. Other men stood guard inside, while associates searched the surrounding bush with spotlights and torches. Possibly nobody in the party was aware that

volunteers in faraway Guyra had taken similar action in 1921. From the beginning of this paramilitary exercise pebbles continued to descend in a soft, steady drizzle. Some were like large sandgrains; others the size of eggs and river pebbles. In the wintry bitterness of the June night the freshly fallen stones warmed the hands of all who picked them up.

The vigils, in which Cyril Penny sometimes participated, continued for several weeks. Occasionally farmers would fire their shotguns into the bush, in the faint hope that they might frighten the joker away. But few, by this time, continued to believe that a joker had ever existed. The stones were gradually becoming a phenomenon - admittedly strange, but accepted nevertheless. And as the soft pebble-fall became almost commonplace the crowds of vigilantes thinned. The Smith family, who now regarded the manifestation as more a nuisance than a threat, accepted the inevitable and got on with their lives.

By mid-July news of the Hack farm haunting had reached the metropolitan media. Perth's *Weekend Mail* assigned journalist Hugh Schmitt to cover the outlandish story. The stones were still falling when he arrived. In his first report he described the mysterious missiles as 'ranging in size from a match-head to a hen's egg'. Their temperature could vary from pleasantly warm to quite hot - but although a few had dropped with sufficient force to knock a man down, no one had ever been struck.

Bill Hack recalled a night he spent sitting in the shack with Gilbert Smith. Stones were falling onto the roof with unusual intensity, sometimes making conversation difficult. Amid the din a large stone *'seemed to emerge from the wall, falling slowly enough to the floor for me to follow the straight line of its descent'*.

Reporter Schmitt wrote that during his time at the farm, volunteers ploughed a 'ghost-break' around the Smith house. The circle was so wide that anyone engaged in throwing stones would be forced to cross it. No trace of a footprint was found.

An Aboriginal elder spoke to the Hacks. He announced that the phenomena were being caused by Jean Smith's father, who had suffered a fatal heart attack three months earlier while digging a posthole. Mrs Hack, who was deeply fearful of anything supernatural, set herself to find a logical explanation. She began by standing guard at dusk beside the wire fence that ran about 180 metres from the Smiths' shack. She hoped to detect a twanging of the wire, which might be a signal that a human culprit was scrambling

through.

There was no twanging. Only a bright ball of light which suddenly appeared close to where she stood. It hovered about two metres above the ground, then moved swiftly away down the gully and disappeared. ‘I had no idea what the light was,’ Mrs Hack said. ‘I just knew it was connected, somehow, to everything that had been happening.’

Shortly after Hugh Schmitt’s articles appeared, employee Cyril Penny left the Hacks’ farm to find other work. The stonefalls stopped, never to resume. It is difficult to find a record of Penny’s movements before March 1957, when he was hired by Alan Donaldson, owner of the property Corabin in Pumphrey, Western Australia. With his wife Lorna and their baby, Penny moved into a small corrugated iron shack owned by his employer.

Several days later, the young farmworker was reduced to panic when showers of warm stones began softly to fall on him, his house and his family. A procession of journalists and curious scientists visited the farm. All agreed that although the stones seemed to be descending lazily from above, there was nobody up there dropping them. In the cloudless March sky a plane or helicopter would immediately have been visible.

Penny, who had seemingly been a mere bystander in the Mayanup case, was now the focus of what was perhaps an even more mysterious haunting. Britain’s *Daily Express* correspondent observed that the stones followed him wherever he went. They even dogged his steps (always harmlessly) when he retreated into the farmhouse - appearing from the ceiling as if no roof existed.

Hugh Schmitt covered the new case - reporting that many of the stones falling at Pumphrey weighed as much as three pounds. While he dined with the Donaldsons in their kitchen, several pebbles - smooth and warm - clattered onto the table. Stones were everywhere in the house, even nestling in hurricane lamps. As the stonefalls’ notoriety increased, tourists and novelty retailers arrived at the farm, offering to pay up to $10 a piece for the ‘pebbles from nowhere’. But the Donaldsons refused to sell. They had no interest in profiting from their employee’s misery.

The rain of stones on the young father, and on the property itself, abated. Cyril Penny - blamed by fellow- workers for introducing the phenomenon - gave notice and moved away. As he was no longer plagued by pebbles, the media did not follow him. Few know what became of him after April 1957.

Ghosts in the Lens

The Drowned Man's Face that Invaded a Photograph

Between 1959 and 2005, 16 visitors - all but one of them male - have drowned in what locals describe as a jinxed pool in Babinda, Queensland. When police took an infrared photo of the treacherous spot, the face of a dead victim appeared, staring up from the crystal water (see pictures). The area's tribal elders blame an ancient curse for the tragedies and their attendant paranormal phenomena. And they warn that the relentlessly recurring deaths follow a balefully predetermined pattern…

ON 27 MAY 2005 THE ABC TV SERIES 'Message Stick' presented a disquieting panel discussion. The talk centred on a cascading mountain stream in far-north Queensland: a waterway whose catchment is known locally as the Devil's Pool.

Presenter Rachael Maza introduced the telecast thus:

'Today we take you to far-north Queensland, to a small town called Babinda, where an ancient curse has been claiming the lives of young male travellers. The place is known as Devil's Pool.

'Its deep swirling waters have killed 16 people, though unofficially the figures are much higher. According to local authorities the deaths are caused by cramps and currents, but a local elder tells us she knows what's really luring them to the water…'

To some viewers, these remarks might have sounded like the introduction to an 'X-Files' episode. But the facts surrounding the beauty spot known as Devil's Pool, or The Boulders, are incontrovertible.

- Police records collected over 46 years confirm that every person known to have drowned in the pool has been a *tourist* or *'outsider'*.
- Every drowning victim (with the single exception in 1989 of German tourist Jutta Minx) has been a single male.
- Collection of death toll statistics began in 1959. The pool's real toll is believed to be several times greater than the official 16.
- Forensic files contain a bizarre 1979 police photograph containing a 'death image' of a victim's face.

In 1990 former councillor and local poet Shirley Harwood recorded a legendary history of the pool. It was recounted to her by sisters Annie and Nancy Wonga, members of the Yidinji, an Aboriginal clan who once lived in the Boulders area. Local Aboriginals believe the pool is haunted by the ghost of a lovesick young woman. She lures young single men to their deaths in the hope that one of them might prove to be her forbidden love - a warrior.

On 22 June 1979 Patrick McGann, a 24-year-old male nurse, became the seventh officially known victim of the treacherous waters. Two hours before the tragedy occurred his girlfriend had taken a snapshot of him, cigarette in

mouth, sitting in a rowing boat. On the night of his disappearance, police photographed the pool, using infrared film. When the prints were developed, one of them showed Patrick's face, complete with cigarette, peering from the cascading rapids.

Eleven years after Patrick McGann died, journalist Denise Dalgleish interviewed his father. Her article *(Australasian Post, 2* March 1991*)* reads in part:

> *…Patrick's father Terry travelled from his home in Yass, NSW, to help search for his son's body. And (the pool) nearly killed him, too. Now, for the first time since Patrick's death in 1979, Terry has talked about the tragedy.*
>
> *'I slipped in not far from where Pat fell,' Terry, now 71, recalled. 'I was being sucked down. I thought I was going to go like my son, but a bloke poked a stick in and I grabbed it. It's such a serene place - the danger's not obvious.'*
>
> *Terry doesn't believe in the legend which surrounds the area. 'It's a nice little story,' he said. But he becomes almost reverent when he talks of the eerie photo he believes shows his son's face after his death. 'It was for police records and when it was developed the sergeant at Babinda took me quietly to one side. There was Pat's face in the water. He looked exactly the same in both photos, even to the cigarette in his mouth. I've spoken to many priests about it and one told me, "There's a lot of things in life we will never understand. This is one of them."'*

A plaque dedicated to Terry McGann's son was installed in the Boulders carpark: 'Pray for the soul of Patrick McGann. He came for a visit on 22.6.79…and stayed forever.'

Most of the ABC's panel members expressed the conviction that The Boulders deaths were governed by a supernatural force:

MAISIE SMITH: Sixteen young men have drowned there - and they've all been from other towns. I had a son who swam in the same spot. I'd say, 'Be careful' - and he'd say, 'I'm not a tourist, Mum - I'm a local. I won't drown there.'

DARYL MURGHS: We [had] no fear of drowning because we were told the legend…so we still swam in the Devil's Pool. As Aboriginal boys at that time

we still maintained our culture, our belief. And we still believed back in those days that there was something protecting us…like an aura around all of us who were swimming. We had white friends, too, who were protected by the same thing.

DULCIE SCHNITZERLING: (referring to Patrick McGann) When the father came down, the police took him out and showed him where he went down in the chute. And the policeman took photos of that, thinking it's just a chute. And when he went to Innisfail next morning to get them developed, that's what they found. In that photo he's even got the cigarette in his mouth.

EVELYN DAVIES: It's strange how young men get drowned out there… [and] they're nearly all white…They never take one of our boys from here, do they? It's always strangers.

ANNIE WONGA, YIDINJI ELDER: We weren't allowed to come up here [as children]. It's like a sacred spot. Babinda means water flowing over rocks.

MAISIE SMITH: I went to school with Annie and Nancy Wonga. We'd go down to their house. Old Grandma used to sit there. I'd say, 'I'm going out to the Boulders. And she'd say, 'Oh, don't go out there. Bad place. Evil place.'

Dead Man’s Startling Silhouette

Two years after her beloved husband Jimmy died, Mrs Emmy Barnes accepted an invitation to go out with a man she had met through friends. When her suitor eventually proposed, she accepted. She knew that if Jimmy was aware of her decision he would be pleased. In his last, poignant weeks he had repeatedly urged her not to be lonely after his death, but to find happiness again. He had even promised (jokingly, she imagined at the time) that he would be present at her second wedding.

Jimmy honoured his pledge.

In June 1982 Emmy wrote to me from her home in Adelaide to make an extraordinary claim. She reported that the silhouette of her dead husband had somehow appeared in a photograph taken at her second wedding. The following month I was able to study the picture and its supporting photographic evidence for myself. As an analysis of the key negative would subsequently confirm, the dead man’s image (see photograph) was indeed prominent in the picture. And the inexplicable silhouette was only part of the story.

‘While Jimmy lay dying we had many conversations,’ Emmy told me. ‘He made several very specific predictions to me, which I assumed were the result of physical weakness or delirium. But in the months after his funeral his forecasts - quite astonishingly - began to come true in considerable detail.

‘I still vividly remember Jimmy’s first prediction to me. He said I’d definitely marry again - and that my new husband’s initials would be B.B. Jimmy said I’d first meet this man after being introduced to an Irishwoman born in India. I’d recognise her because, within a few moments of us meeting, she’d invite me to look at her new lounge suite, which would be covered in a bottle-green fabric.

Jimmy also said he’d be present when I remarried.

I didn’t take much notice of all this. I was too grieved - and anyway I imagined his predictions were the wanderings of a dying man. But then it all began to happen. I was working in a hospital in the period after Jimmy’s death - and a friend I’d made there invited me to a party. I was scarcely inside the door when the hostess, whom I’d never met, urged me to follow her to an adjoining room so she could show me what her husband had bought her. It was a three-piece lounge suite covered in bottle-green. We began to talk - and

I learned that my hostess was of Irish descent but had been born in Delhi, India - as Jimmy had foretold.

‘It was at that party that his forecasts started falling into place. I was introduced to a man named Bernard Barnes (B.B.) - and within months I’d accepted his marriage proposal. A few days before the ceremony, some friends clubbed together to buy me a wedding present: a professionally shot portrait. When the picture was delivered to them they couldn’t believe what they were seeing.

‘A friend called around to give me the news. She said, “You’ll never believe this Emmy, but your Jimmy’s in the photo.” I had a problem believing her, but when I saw the portrait later that day I knew she was right, quite dramatically so.

‘Jimmy’s silhouette was reflected in a sideboard mirror. I knew then that he’d kept his promise - and was staying close to me for my second wedding.’

Outback Apparition on Film

In 1959 a clergyman, Reverend R.S. Blance, photographed an abandoned ceremonial site at Corroboree Rock, about 200 kilometres from Alice Springs. He noticed nothing unusual while pointing the camera - but when his film was developed it was dominated by the figure of a white- robed man.

Rev. Blance's Corroboree Rock photograph inspired international speculation.

Reverend Blance was bewildered by the image. He knew little about the location, other than a rumour that it had been the scene of cruel rituals in the distant past. And he could offer no theory to explain why an unidentifiable person should silently have intruded on his film.

Despite the lack of information surrounding it, the picture was reproduced in newspapers and journals around the world, becoming one of the 20th century's most discussed ghost photographs.

Asphalt Apparitions

Killed on the Road by a Tortured Ghost

Do smash victims haunt the highways on which they died? Reports from a surprisingly large number of witnesses indicate that bizarre confrontations, suggestive of the supernatural, do occur on our nation's roads. The most remarkable Australian case of an asphalt apparition received wide publicity during the 1980s when 19 cars were involved in a massive crash on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. Police could find no clear cause for the pileup. But some motorists insisted they had swerved to avoid a ghostly figure - misty, floating and of human shape…

SEVERAL DAYS AFTER 19 cars had crashed bonnet-to-rear end along the Mornington Peninsula freeway I received a call from my friend, the journalist John Westbury. ‘As you know,’ said John, ‘I’m open-minded about ghosts, but tending toward disbelief. Nevertheless, something extremely weird’s going on around here. I think you should come down and take a look.’

I followed his advice.

Over the previous six months motorists in the area had been privately discussing with friends and families a phenomenon their minds could not encompass. On the local roads a misty apparition had been seen floating about a foot above the bitumen. People would have liked to dismiss it as fog which, by the merest fluke of air currents, had momentarily taken quasi-human shape. But that explanation wouldn’t do, because too many motorists were describing the same chimera. In several cases the white wraith had floated so close to windscreens that the drivers swerved and almost crashed.

One local resident who made an emergency stop to avoid hitting the figure was Bill Featherstone, a Seaford boilermaker. He told me:

> *‘The thing almost forced me off the road. I was driving my Falcon along the Frankston-Mornington freeway at about six in the morning when a white figure just jumped out in front of me. It was so close I was certain I’d hit it. I stood so hard on the brakes I almost went through the windscreen. Then I sat in the car, shivering with fright. The thing had simply vanished. It was the most terrifying moment of my life.*
>
> *‘The 19-car pileup happened on the freeway just four days later. The talk around here is that the motorists in front saw the same thing I did, swung the wheel to miss it and started the concertina.’*

Among others who encountered the manifestation was my original informant, John Westbury:

> *‘My wife and I were doing about a hundred kilometres an hour along the freeway when this misty white thing, shaped like a man, suddenly appeared right in front of the windscreen. I’m not a believer in ghosts - but I can’t explain what I saw, either. The figure has frightened a large number of people in the Frankston area.’*

Little-commented upon at the time was the fact that a second accident

happened almost concurrently with the 19-car crash. ‘The misty shape drifted up to the flyover road,’ John Westbury recalled. ‘Within moments two cars had collided up there.’

I later discovered that the apparition was also thought to have caused two deaths. A driver in a fatal accident insisted to ambulance men that he had swerved to avoid something that was ‘half-man, half-fog’.

However, police to whom I spoke were sceptical. A constable who had investigated another concertina collision - this time in local Chelsea Road - told me: ‘People are reporting to us that they’ve seen a foggy figure - but that’s all they ARE seeing: fog! I’ll bet the ghost is nothing more than puddles of water formed on the road, which evaporate as mist.’

Bill Featherstone was unimpressed. ‘As an early- morning driver and former tow-truck man I know mist when I see it. I can tell you for sure - this thing is no mist.’

Calls Flooded a Radio Station

Coast-dwelling radio listeners appeared to agree. When Greg Evans invited me to discuss the alleged freeway haunting on his 3MP radio program he was flooded by calls from listeners who asserted that they too had seen the phantom. Production staff said the station had never previously experienced such a dramatic talkback result. Moments after Greg completed our conversation an army of witnesses took to their telephones - many alleging that their encounter with the phantom had almost ended fatally.

One caller said, ‘The thing’s been around a long time. I saw it about 10 years ago. It was white, in the shape of a woman, hovering above the overpass.’ Another listener reported that he and his father had been driving down deserted Thompsons Road at 5.30 am, when they noticed that a ‘red, glowing light’ was following them. ‘It was hovering at eye-level,’ he said.

‘We were dead scared - and when we checked with friends we learned that quite a few people had had the same experience.’

A female listener recalled, ‘I was driving with my husband when the grey misty shape of a woman suddenly hurled itself in front of the car. I was so frightened I almost swerved off the road.’

Several callers believed that far from seeing an apparition they had been buzzed by an unidentified flying object. Others recalled that there had been at least two violent deaths in the ‘haunted’ area: a pilot who perished when his aircraft crashed and a man who hanged himself near the freeway.

My interviews with motorists, combined with the response to Greg Evans’s program, convinced me that the Mornington Peninsula phantom was one of Australia’s most widely witnessed paranormal phenomena. These singular events were not, of course, peculiar to coastal Victoria. There have been numerous well-publicised ‘hauntings’ on highways in Britain, Europe, the United States and elsewhere. During the 1990s an American psychical research society claimed to have identified 16 road sites at which entities are repeatedly seen and where accidents often occur. Some researchers believe that road- ghosts are lingering after-images of people killed in smashes or by suicide.

Before describing other highway hauntings I have studied in Australia over the years I will touch briefly on three cases which demonstrate the

phenomenon's *global* nature.

In a letter to me from her new home in Whyalla Playford, South Australia, Barbara Wainman wrote:

> *When an old lady stepped in front of my brother-in-law's car I braced myself for a horrible accident. But to my astonishment the vehicle passed straight through her as though she were empty air. This extraordinary incident occurred near Sheffield, England, in 1980. Ken, my brother-in-law, was driving me home from a family gathering. The rain was teeming down as we passed Derwent Dam where the movie* Dambusters *was filmed.*
>
> *Just as we passed a large house I noticed the lady, dressed in grey, standing by the roadside. When I asked Ken what she could be doing outside on such a filthy night he didn't reply. But suddenly she stepped in front of the car. I screamed a warning, then waited for the impact. But there was nothing. She vanished into the headlights.*
>
> *I turned to my brother-in-law and incredulously asked him why he hadn't swerved. He said he'd seen nothing, but then asked whether the person I'd glimpsed had been a woman in grey clothes. When I nodded he revealed that other people in the district had also reported encounters with her. This incident has puzzled me ever since - especially the fact that the woman was perfectly clear to me and yet invisible to Ken.*

Road Wraiths Reported Worldwide

As a further indication that the ‘asphalt apparition’ phenomenon is not peculiar to Australia, I quote two widely-publicised examples:

In 1990 a local council in eastern Norway erected signs warning motorists that ghosts might cause hazards on the stretch of highway ahead. Britain’s *Daily Telegraph* quoted a roads department official thus: ‘We’ve had dozens of multiple crashes on this seemingly safe stretch over the past year. So many drivers, tested as sober, have told police they swerved to avoid phantom figures that we’ve finally been forced to believe them.’

The report added that the ‘source of the phantoms’ was thought to be a roadside cabin in which a drunken railway worker suicided after murdering his mother and sister.

One of the world’s most notorious freeway phantom cases occurred near Petersburg in South Africa’s Transvaal. The deadly disturbance, which attracted enormous media interest, began in 1954, when 23 people died in 16 accidents on a 50-metre stretch of bitumen over a three-week period. Police investigations showed that all the vehicles had been in reasonable to excellent condition, that there were no imperfections in the road, minimal wind and no oil-slicks.

When uproar over the so-called ‘hoodoo highway’ was at its height a group of Xhosa tribesmen approached a local newspaper. The road, they said, was jinxed.

Ten days before the rash of accidents began a witchdoctor had been struck and killed by a car - and now his spirit had returned to seek revenge. When the medicine man died, the tribesmen said, his *doulosses* (magical animal bones) must have been scattered across the road. Until the bones were buried with him he would continue to trouble the highway.

Police searched the highway and flanking veldt, but the bones - if they existed - could not be found. The haunting continued for five years, prompting motorists to make wide detours to avoid the area.

Woman ‘Floated Above Bitumen’

In the late 1980s an entity thought to be the ghost of a suicide victim repeatedly startled motorists in Queensland’s Gold Coast hinterland. One witness, Bronwyn Gluyas of Burleigh Heads, told me, ‘Late one night I was on the back of my boyfriend’s motorcycle, travelling to his parents’ house. It was very dark and we could see nothing outside the yellow pool of the headlight. Up ahead I spotted a woman walking alone. I wondered what she was doing there, because there were no houses for miles.

‘Then, as we got closer I realised she wasn’t walking at all. She seemed to be *gliding* a foot or so above the ground. My main impression was her long straight hair - either blonde or grey, it was impossible to see. Not until we got to my boyfriend’s house did I ask whether he’d noticed the woman too. He had - and he was as disturbed by the sight as I was.

‘Until then neither of us had thought much about ghosts - but we both agreed we’d seen one. Over the next week we made enquiries - and learned that the floating woman was quite well known locally. Apparently she’d gone into the bush near the spot where we saw her - and suicided with sleeping pills. She had long blonde hair, just like the person we’d seen.’

The Uncanny Swagman

Case notes and letters on my files show that asphalt apparitions have been reported in many regions of Australia. Sometimes the confrontations have produced unpleasant physical effects, as Mrs M. Camilleri of Fairfield, Victoria, testified:

> *In 1959 my husband, brother-in-law and I were driving home from a country holiday. The night was pitch-black, but clear and starry. We were travelling along a straight stretch of road when we saw what seemed to be a small patch of fog far ahead. As we approached it assumed the shape of a human figure, un-hunching itself and thumbing a ride.*
>
> *My brother-in-law stepped on the gas. We were all aware that we had seen a ghost. And in each of us it had created sensations of nausea and paralysing fear. A kilometre further on we compared mental notes and agreed on what we had seen - an old-style swagman, completely transparent, with beard, cork-bobbed hat and trousers in bicycle clips. My husband was sure the man's swag had been resting on a rock beside him. But my brother-in-law said, 'Swag be damned! It was another of the buggers, sitting down.'*
>
> *For all of us, the crunch came three weeks later. A semi-trailer crashed in the same spot and the driver was killed. I still wonder today whether he too saw the ghost and was frightened out of his wits.*

AN EERIE INCIDENT involving a spectral FJ Holden was described to me by John Effre of Maryborough, Queensland.

'My wife Audrey and I, along with four friends, had been waterskiing on the Hawkesbury River,' he recalled. Afterwards the six of us climbed into the car to set off for home. I was driving - and the road ahead was completely empty. Then, just outside Windsor, I got one of the worst shocks of my life. On the road just a metre ahead of us a black FJ Holden suddenly appeared from nowhere.

'Daryl, one of our friends in the car, screamed a warning - "Look out, you'll hit it!" I slammed on the brakes, but even as I did so, the black FJ vanished. Everyone in the car was thunderstruck. We'd all seen that black

Holden and in the long discussions that followed we agreed it couldn't possibly have been a reflection or illusion. That just wouldn't have been possible with six people observing from different angles.

'Later a policeman at Windsor told us there had been many accidents on the road we'd travelled, including one that killed four people. He also confirmed that there were numerous reports of a phantom car.'

A SIMILAR DESCRIPTION of near-death on the road came to me from Wendy J. of Gladstone, Queensland. 'My husband, children and I were travelling at night between Ipswich and Toowoomba,' she said. 'My husband changed lanes to pass a slow car ahead of us, whereupon we all got a terrible fright. A young bearded man suddenly appeared on the white line. He was walking directly into the path of our fast-moving car. As everyone screamed my husband swerved to avoid him.

'Fearful that we might have grazed the man my eldest daughter and I looked back at the road, which was brightly lit by the headlights of following cars. But the man had gone as suddenly as he'd appeared. We all agreed there was just no logical way he could have vanished so abruptly.

'Next day, still shaken, I took the risk of sounding like a fool and told a neighbour what had happened. Before I finished my story she asked whether the man had been in his early 20s, slim and about six feet tall, with collar-length hair. I was stunned that she had so accurately described the person we'd encountered. She told me that what we had seen had also appeared to other motorists. It was thought to be the apparition of a young man who had died on that road many years before.'

Parapsychologists theorise that some people who die violently (as in road accidents) are unable to struggle free from their earthly environments. Hauntings of this kind have sometimes been apparently resolved by 'rescue seances', in which the confused entities are advised that they are dead and should move on.

Road-ghost Remembered, In a Haunting Hit Song

The phantom image of a teenage girl killed in a motorcycle accident troubled singer Jon English's dreams for several months.

Finally English - who has made Australia his home - managed to exorcise the (possibly apocryphal) ghost by making her the subject of a song, 'She Was Real'. Today, decades after the girl is said to have died, it is still his most requested concert number.

'The song is based on a court case that seems to obsess everyone who hears about it,' Jon told me when we met at Melbourne's Channel 9. 'It all came to light in 1982, in my former hometown, Southend, England. A young motorcyclist was charged with maliciously wasting police time. In his defence he said he'd become lost late one night and had stopped, trying to get his bearings, when a beautiful girl in bike leathers approached him, introduced herself as Susie and asked for a lift. She said she was in trouble and needed to get home immediately. She gave him a street number and promised to show him how to get there.

'On the way to Southend they talked for a long time. He asked her out for the following Saturday *and* she accepted. Then, at the Cheltenham roundabout he suddenly heard a bump and she wasn't there any more. After a frantic search he ran to a phonebox and called police. They searched till sunrise, then accompanied him to the address the girl had given.

'A middle-aged woman answered the door. When they asked her if Susie had got home safely she burst into tears and accused them of playing sadistic games. She then revealed that Susie had died in a motorbike smash 12 years earlier - at Cheltenham roundabout.

'The police were furious and immediately charged the young bloke with malicious mischief. In court the poor bastard kept saying, "She was real! She was real!" The magistrate was so bemused by his story that he let him off. But a lot of people left the court convinced that Cheltenham roundabout was haunted. And there are still stories in the district about a girl who doesn't know she's dead - and is trying to find her way home.'

Haunted Houses

The Phantom Stain Science Couldn't Explain

When a damp, pungent-smelling stain rotted the wallpaper of their new house an Adelaide couple did everything possible to find its source. But neither plumbers nor builders could offer an answer. Scientists from CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) *analysed samples of the oozing paper, but could only report that it was 'human or animal urine of unknown origin'. The unpleasant phenomenon coincided with terrifying bouts of poltergeist activity, a devastating explosion and repeated appearances by a spectral woman. The villa's frightened owners were not alone in their ordeal. Reliable witnesses across Australia have reported ghostly intrusions which similarly shattered their domestic peace…*

THE PRETTY BRICK VENEER HOUSE STOOD AMID flowering native trees in a pleasant suburb of Adelaide. For several days after they moved in with their son Michael, the house's new owners, Ken and Di Klose, were delighted with their purchase. But then, quite literally, the rot set in. The couple's first inkling that something was wrong came when they were repeatedly woken at night by footsteps. The nocturnal noises were an overture to more sinister events. At two o'clock one morning Di was shocked awake by a cold hand gripping her throat. She wrestled free by rolling from bed. 'And then,' she recalled, 'the destruction of property began.

'Ken bought a new Volvo. One day, while it was parked, the cold engine blew up - causing $9500 worth of damage. The insurance assessors couldn't make out what had happened. They said there seemed no logical cause for the explosion. It hadn't started in the seat of the wiring, or in the fuel injection - the places you'd expect. The investigators were equally puzzled by the swimming pool filter, which kept exploding for no reason they could find.

'While all this was happening there was a quite frightening burst of poltergeist activity - and repeated appearances by the figure of a young woman who looked about 24 years old. Our friends saw her most frequently. Strangely Ken and I only glimpsed her from the corners of our eyes.'

The couple suffered most distress from a phenomenon in the living room: a mysterious wet stain which filled the house with a foul odour. 'It began as a huge seeping patch on the wallpaper,' Di said. 'We spent a couple of months trying to dry it with fans and heaters, but it just grew worse. Finally we called in contractors to check for leaking pipes or cracks in the roof. They found nothing.

'Then we called in CSIRO. They took samples of the oozing wallpaper…and reported back that it was "human or animal urine of unknown origin" - but they couldn't venture anything more than that. By this time the stench was becoming so terrible I called the contractors back and asked them to cut a hole in the floorboards so they could check under the house. We were looking desperately for a logical explanation of everything. But instead the man in charge emerged from under the floor looking very pale, saying, "You must be haunted." He said there were absolutely no cobwebs under the floor - and that was a sure sign of supernatural possession. Over the following weeks the stinking damp became unbearable.'

Unbowed, Di determined to retrieve her house from the forces that had invaded it: ‘One night, at the height of all the horrors, I spoke to the ghost. I said it could stay where it was - but only if it behaved itself. If it continued to make trouble we’d get an exorcist to turf it out.’

From that moment the unpleasantness stopped.

‘Neither of us had a clue who the phantom might have been,’ said Di. ‘But after a fair bit of reading on the subject of hauntings I formed a few theories. I think the ghost was an earthbound spirit who had possibly died in the house and saw us as intruders. From the time I said she could stay she seemed happier. I believe she eventually moved on to another stage of existence. I hope she’s found peace.’

Dead Girl Mystery

CSIRO's exposure to the paranormal was not confined to the study of urine-stained wallpaper. For several decades of the 20th century Australia's pre-eminent scientific organisation was confronted by a ghost on its own premises. The haunting happened in stately Stawell House, a sandstone Georgian mansion on Tasmania's Battery Point.

Staff researchers were reluctant (at least publicly) to discuss the mansion's resident wraith, whom they nicknamed 'the Grey Lady'. But retired horticultural scientist Dr Don Martin saw no reason why the truth should not be revealed. 'The woman's ghost appeared to me twice - in 1956 and 1957,' he told me. 'On both occasions I was working overtime in my office, directly under the building's old tower.

'Each time, something prompted me to look up from my papers and glance in the direction of the open doorway. Framed in it was the figure of a young woman, wearing a grey crinoline hooped dress with short sleeves. I sensed that the apparition was benign and friendly. But although I stared, to the extent of screwing up my eyes, I couldn't make out any features…the face was blurred and misty. While I was trying to get a more focused view of her, she vanished.'

Intrigued by his encounter, and by comparable reports from colleagues, Dr Martin delved into the old mansion's history. 'I discovered that Stawell House had been used as a hospital before CSIRO took it over,' he said. 'I managed to talk with the matron, who was retired. She said she had often seen the ghost. The consensus seems to be that the phantom is the spirit of a young woman who became pregnant to a criminal in the 1850s.

'The girl's angry stepfather reportedly threw her down the tower stairs to her death.'

Spectre Stalked an Island House

In the early 1990s, workers on Queensland's Stradbroke Island insisted that they were being terrorised, by a figure shrouded in mist. Epicentre of the haunting was an old house used as staff sleeping quarters.

One victim of the 'mist-monster' was an ambulance officer, Bob Terkelson. In an official report to his employers, the Cleveland Ambulance Committee, he claimed that the being paralysed him, then tried to render him unconscious. Bob had his brush with the unknown while sleeping in the ambulance service's antiquated cottage. He told me:

> *'I was deeply asleep when I was suddenly woken by an intense pain in my left hand. Imagining I'd got a cramp I tried to change my position. It was then I realised that my upper body was paralysed. I was totally pinned to the bed. It felt as though someone was leaning over me, with one knee on my left hand and two hands on my shoulders. With my free right hand I tried to push away whatever was pressing me down - but it felt as though nothing was there.*
>
> *'At this stage I became aware of a cloudy mist-like substance, just above me. In the fog was a face. It had bright, intense eyes staring directly into mine - and it seemed to be sneering. But its breath was the worst aspect. It was so putrid I almost threw up. Inhaling that overpowering smell, I felt as though I was losing control - and that I could die at any moment. The fear galvanised me. I summoned all my strength, threw myself from the bed and turned on the light.*
>
> *'The face had vanished, but I still had the strong feeling I wasn't alone in the room. I searched the cottage for signs of an intruder, but everything was secure, with no sign of forced entry. Finally I went back to bed and managed to doze off. When I woke next morning my palm was bruised. And the room was still thick with that overpowering smell from the apparition's mouth.'*

Bob had had no previous contact with ghosts and was anxious 'to make some kind of sense' of what had happened. His initial theory was that the attack might have been linked to a grimacing ceremonial mask from the islands, which he had bought in Cairns, several months earlier. A visiting missionary

urged him to burn the ornament, which was of a type that some tribes associated with demonic possession. He was preparing, belatedly, to follow the advice when colleagues insisted that what he had actually seen was the ‘Stradbroke Phantom’. Believed to be an Aboriginal spirit, it had haunted the island since the first white intruders arrived.

A SIMILARLY ALARMING entity occupied a derelict cottage near Cockle Bay on Queensland’s Magnetic Island. A young prospective bridegroom needed psychiatric treatment after self-styled friends, celebrating his buck’s night, chained him up overnight in the burned-out building. The victim told me the ordeal had pushed him ‘close to a breakdown’ but declined to offer further detail, saying he was unwilling to reopen the wound.

Other islanders were readier to talk. Fisherman Arthur Green recalled, ‘I’d heard a lot of stories about the cottage from blokes at the Picnic Bay pub. I couldn’t decide whether I should regard them as true, or just beery bulldust, until the afternoon I was walking home after a fishing trip.

‘For reasons I forget - possibly to take a stone out of my shoe - I happened to sit down directly outside that house. I regretted doing so - it was as if I’d triggered an alarm. Immediately there was a shrieking noise behind me. I whipped around and saw the smoky figure of a man. He was gesturing at me violently, obviously telling me to go away. I could actually feel the anger radiating out at me and I didn’t need any further persuading. I got up and ran.

‘I later learned that a 40-year-old man was killed, maybe murdered in that house. I think he was the one I saw. From that day I fished elsewhere.’

Spectral Snapshot

When real estate agent John Effer photographed the interior of a grand century-old house in Howard, Queensland, he obtained images he hadn't bargained for. 'I was definitely the only person in the place while I took the snaps and I saw nothing unusual,' John told me. 'But when I collected the developed prints I got the shock of my life…' Two of the photographs, taken in separate rooms, contain the misty floating image of a woman with arms outstretched. The face, neck and hair are clearly visible.' John was adamant that the swirling forms could not have been created by smoke. 'The Maryborough company I worked for forbade its employees to light cigarettes on the job - and there were no cane fires burning that day. The shots couldn't have been a double-exposure either. I used a Canon AEI reflex camera, equipped with an electronic shutter. The film had to be advanced after firing, making double exposures impossible.'

I learned that the house had formerly been owned by the Queensland Senator Dame Annabel Rankin. Several months after it was sold I spoke to the new owners, plumbing contractor Terry Ward and his wife Jan. Jan Ward said, 'We've studied John's photos and we're in no doubt they're genuine. A lot of strange things have happened to us in this place. When we moved in, one of the rooms was divided with modular wardrobes. In hindsight these seemed to annoy our ghost, because we were kept awake every night by the sound of banging. The moment we removed the wardrobes - restoring the room to its original state - the racket stopped. We've never seen the grey woman's phantom and hope we never will. But we're in no doubt something's living with us…what we hear is proof of it: sounds of furniture being moved around when nobody's there - and a grating noise like huge fingernails being scraped along the floorboards.'

ANOTHER REPORT connected with the real estate industry came to me from a Melbourne correspondent, Shirley Bramich. She described to me how an apparition tried, as she perceived it, to prevent the sale of a family house:

> *In 1991 a lady friend and I went to stay in Tasmania with Glen, a distant relative. His mother had recently died in the house, after a long illness. On the first night we sat up, talking endlessly, and went to bed very late.*

My friend fell asleep immediately in her bed opposite mine, but I was restless and uneasy. I tossed and turned, unable to settle - and then, without warning I got an unpleasant surprise.

Standing at the foot of my bed was a short, bearded man with black curly hair. He was wearing outmoded clothes and his demeanour suggested he was angry…for what reason I neither knew nor cared; I only wanted him to go away. I'd never seen a ghost before, but I knew without a breath of doubt that I was facing one now. I lay there frozen - unable to get up and run from the room, but fervently willing the man to leave. Eventually, to my relief he faded from view.

Next day I described the apparition to Glen's nephew. He didn't laugh as I'd feared he might, but instead looked out a stack of old family photo albums. After a long search he found a page containing a photograph of a dead relation named Eric and asked, 'Would this be him?' The man in the picture had black hair, a beard and old-fashioned outfit. I said yes - that looked very much like the person who had appeared in my room. The nephew didn't know much about Eric - only that, when alive, he had been devoted to Glen's mother.

For weeks afterward I couldn't work it out. Why had Eric appeared to me, a mere visitor? And why had he been so unmistakably angry? Eventually, back at home in Melbourne, I came up with a tentative explanation. Glen, I knew, was planning to sell the house in which he and his mother had lived for so long. Could it be that the ghost disapproved and had been trying to convey, to me of all people, that the sale should be cancelled?

Well, it was only speculation on my part, I'll admit - but I thought it worthwhile to write to Glen and put my tentative conclusions to him. I suggested he walk around the house and convey mentally to the ghost that everything was OK and that he'd be taking his mother's spirit to the new place with him. Shortly after that, the house found a buyer. I asked Glen whether he'd taken my advice and talked to the ghost. He smiled and said, 'Yes, it was done.'

A Dead Aunt, Uncanny Dreams, and a Diary

Cases in which the spirits of dead people try, seemingly, to influence the thoughts of the living are common in paranormal literature. One of the strangest of the Australian incidents on my files was sent to me by Carole Lee Boord of Christies Beach, South Australia:

> *In the mid-1980s I suddenly (and quite uncharacteristically) started having a series of premonitions. One day, for example, a friend's boat was stolen. I had a picture of it being kept at Alding Beach. I could see the boat in someone's back yard, under trees, beside a hedge. My vision came true a week later: the only difference being that the boat was found one suburb away, at Sellicks Beach. During this unusual period I also correctly predicted two accidents, a false fire alarm at work and (on numerous occasions) the times at which the phone at home would ring.*
>
> *Then came the strongest feeling of all. I sensed that a particular aunt (dead for several years) was trying to speak to me. This was odd in itself, because I'd only met her a few times when I was a child. Nevertheless I kept getting a mental picture of a book, which (irrationally) I simply 'knew' belonged to her. I could see that the book had a maroon cover with gold lettering and decorative illustrations… and I had the impression it was quite old.*
>
> *Thoughts of this book kept popping into my mind for about a week. When I was visiting my father I told him about my odd experiences - finally mentioning the feeling that my aunt was sending me a message about a book. He looked hard at me for a moment, then went to an upstairs room and started to rummage through drawers.*
>
> *Ten minutes later he returned, carrying the book I'd seen in my mind's eye. It was complete with everything, from the maroon cover to the decorations and the gold lettering. My aunt's name was on the flyleaf. She had kept it as a scrapbook, in which she jotted down thoughts from her favourite authors and philosophers. I knew as soon as I held the volume in my hands that she wanted me to read those thoughts - and be guided by them.*

Fear in an Isolated Farmhouse

A shearer, decapitated by an exploding gas bottle, reportedly haunts a remote Queensland sheep station. Debbie Gray of Proserpine saw the entity several times. ‘We were living in an old shearer’s house on the property, about two hours’ drive from Winton,’ she told me. ‘The place was several kilometres from the main road, so we seldom had visitors.

‘One morning, at about one o’clock, my baby woke for her bottle and I got up to attend to her. Our only power came from generators which were turned off at night, so I had to rely on a torch and moonlight shining through the window. While I was heating the milk the screen door at the back squeaked open. I turned and saw the shadowy figure of a man, letting himself out.

‘I assumed it was my brother who was staying with us, so I wasn’t bothered. But at breakfast next morning my brother started questioning my husband Ian really closely. He wanted to know whether he’d been roaming around the house during the night. When Ian truthfully replied that he’d slept right through, my brother looked upset. He refused to say any more, but it was obvious, to me anyway, that he’d seen something he didn’t like.

‘Several nights later, while my eldest daughter and I were watching TV, we heard a car pull up and a door close. I assumed it was Ian, who’d been working late at the shed. But when we went to the door to greet him there was no car, no dust and no sign of a living soul.

‘If a car had come onto the property Ian would have spotted it from the shed. But when he arrived home two hours later he insisted he’d seen nothing. All the time we lived on that station we had the feeling someone, or something, was watching us. It wasn’t a comforting sensation - and we were glad to be finally able to return to Brisbane.

‘While we were packing up, one of the station workers told us something I’m sure had been deliberately kept from us until then. He said a man had died in horrible circumstances in the quarters we were occupying. He’d had an accident with a gas bottle, which had exploded - ripping his head from his shoulders. His ghost had been seen around the property ever since.’

Sinister Sleepout Sealed

Members of a Western Australian farming family were advised to seal off a sleepout which had become a focus for alarming events. The haunting was described to me by Mrs Patricia Orchard of Kalannie:

'We built our new extension room to accommodate friends and relatives who came to stay. It looked very pleasant and we were happy with it at first - but nothing worked out as we'd planned. Before long, we had to concede that nobody could enjoy a decent night's sleep in that room. Now we've closed it off, and the only thing that goes in there these days is junk.

I was one of the first people to use the room, in the late 1980s. I was reading in bed by candlelight, as electricity hadn't yet been extended. Suddenly I heard someone walking toward the sleepout. The footsteps stopped just short of the stairs, which led down to where I was. Then the candle went out - which was alarming, as there was absolutely no wind or draught that night.

I completely froze, knowing something very odd was happening. I called out, then checked, but no one was around. That was just the beginning of a chain of strange events. Several nights later I was woken by lights blazing through the curtains. Thinking a car had pulled up I went outside - only to find that the lights had gone and nothing was visible for miles around. This was no dream. Up to this time I'd kept everything to myself, but now I spoke to one of our shearers, who had also slept in the room. He said he'd had such an ordeal in there that he'd never go back.

After that I learned from my mother, my son and four or five others that they'd had similar experiences in the sleepout. I called in a Church of England minister. After an hour of listening and praying he advised me to seal the room, which I promptly did. But he wouldn't offer any further explanation, leaving me to wonder whether some old tragedy was being re-enacted in the vicinity of our sleepout.'

According to one school of opinion, the spirits of people who have died suddenly and violently often seem unaware that their time on earth has ended. These confused entities can sometimes linger at the death scene, creating a broad range of 'paranormal effects', for periods varying from months to centuries. One long-term haunting of this kind occurred in the Church Street, Richmond, mansion built in the 19th century by Eureka Stockade leader Peter

Lalor.

Lalor died on the premises in 1899, following a mysterious illness. His widow subsequently died of an unexplained fever. Shortly afterward Lalor's daughter suicided by jumping from a balcony. His son - a doctor with a surgery downstairs - hanged himself.

Mrs Margaret Morton bought the Lalors' house during the 1950s. She soon discovered that it was a magnet for supernatural events. One afternoon, while reading in a rocking chair, Mrs Morton's sister felt a cold, invisible hand painfully grasp her ankle. The sisters, and visitors to the house, also reported seeing doors slamming shut without apparent cause, and a glass 'dashing itself' onto tiles without breaking. They claimed also to have heard the ringing of servant-bells which no longer existed. In Melbourne's *Sunday Age* (15 January 1995) journalist Larry Schwartz wrote, 'Mrs Morton's sister suspected Lalor's involvement in such occurrences.'

Wardrobe Reflected a Dead Soldier's Face

The haunting of the Towns family is largely forgotten today, but in the late 19th century it inspired discussion and argument throughout Australia.

Army captain Joseph Towns died at his Sydney house in October 1894. Six weeks after the funeral, he reappeared. Charles Lett, son-in-law of the dead man, was so shaken by the event that he sent a detailed description to the Society for Psychical Research in London:

'…In the evening at about nine o'clock my wife, in company with a Miss Berthon, entered the room, in which the gaslight was burning. They were amazed to see, reflected as it were on the polished surface of the wardrobe, the image of Captain Towns. It was like an ordinary medallion portrait, but life-size. The captain's face appeared wan and pale…and he wore a kind of grey flannel jacket in which he had been accustomed to sleep. Surprised and alarmed at what they saw, their first idea was that a portrait had been hung in the room, and that this was its reflection - but there was no picture of the kind.

'Whilst they were looking and wondering, my wife's sister, Miss Towns, entered the room, and before any of the others had time to speak, she exclaimed, "Good gracious! Do you see papa?"

'One of the housemaids, passing by, was called into the room. Immediately she cried, "Oh, Miss! The Master!" Thereafter the butler, the nurse and the Captain's own servant were summoned. All recognised Captain Towns immediately. Finally, Mrs Towns was sent for and, seeing the apparition, she advanced towards it with one hand extended, as if to touch it. As she passed her hand over the panel of the wardrobe, the figure gradually faded away, and never reappeared.'

F.W. Myers, a co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research, described cases of this kind as 'collective apparitions': entities witnessed, within a brief timespan, by more than one person. In his book *Human Personality and the Survival of Bodily Death* Myers surmised that a ghost might be 'a manifestation of persistent personal energy that continues to take visible form after the person has died'.

More than a century after the Captain Towns incident a Canadian TV director, Noel Wolpert, began collecting reports of ghosts whose images had

appeared in mirrors and shiny surfaces. ‘My most disturbing report concerns a full-length looking-glass that stood in the corner of a room in Bristol where three sisters were murdered,’ he said. ‘The family moved from the house and the mirror ended in an antique shop. Customers, who knew nothing of the killings, claimed they had seen agonised faces in the glass. The mirror was consigned to a tip.’

Wolpert also chronicled what he believed was a ‘mirror-haunting’ in the South Australian suburb of Inglewood. It occurred after company director Hague Showell and his wife Marg moved with their children into a three-level brick house. ‘We rented the place from a man who was transferred overseas,’ Marg Showell told me. ‘At first it seemed an ideal environment for kids, but soon we realised something was badly wrong.

‘Our year-old baby Samuel was terrified of his bedroom mirror. He’d sit in his cot flinching from it and screaming. He behaved as if he’d seen something in the glass that frightened him. Of course we moved the mirror to another room. From then on we experienced a mass of problems in the house, from strange swishing noises on the stairs to footsteps when no intruder was visible. My husband and I kept looking for natural explanations, but occasionally we’d wonder whether that mirror was somehow to blame.

‘One night I went into the nursery to check on Samuel. To my horror a tall solidly built man was standing looking down at my baby, with one hand on the cot. I screamed and he vanished. Next morning our oldest son Michael said he’d woken early to see a man with a misty face peering around his bedroom door. Whether or not the mirror might be connected to all this, we had no idea. We knew only that it was imperative we escape that house. I felt as though the happenings there had aged me a year in a few weeks.’

Haunted Inns

The Telephone Installer – and the Terror in Room 12a

In April 2000 a team of Telstra contractors installed new telephones in the Imperial Hotel, an historic 19th century hostelry in Ravenswood, northern Queensland. One of the men slept on the premises overnight. In the black early morning hours he was abruptly awakened, by a phenomenon he will never forget…

WHEN DUANE AND GINA DAVIES became the owners of Ravenswood's Imperial Hotel they knew little of its uncanny reputation. But it took them less than a week to realise that they were living on haunted premises. The first in a series of abnormal events occurred when paintings went missing from the walls - subsequently turning up in rooms to which only the couple had keys. Before long crockery, clocks, tools and clothing began similarly to vanish and reappear. To students of the paranormal, phenomena of this kind are known as 'apports'.

Guests and staff warned the Davies that they might eventually be confronted by one of the hotel's frequently reported trio of ghosts: an elderly woman with a stick, a man with a flowing beard, and a younger long-haired male dressed in white. Duane saw nothing, but his wife, on her tenth day in the Imperial, encountered the young man, semi-transparent and lingering, seemingly in deep thought, in a corridor. He was outside Room 12a.

In April 2000 a team of Telstra technicians visited the Imperial to upgrade its phone system. One member of the group booked in for the night and was allotted Room 12a. In Queensland's *Sunday Mail* (4 June 2000) Duane Davies described what befell the man:

> *He woke in the middle of the night and felt like something was nudging his ear. When he opened his eyes this spectre was hovering above him. He told me the apparition kept playing with his tie - that's what everybody says when they see this one.*
>
> *The ghost didn't register that he was there. The bloke reckons he was so afraid he locked up with fear and couldn't move. He just sat there for three or four minutes, then it just dissipated.*

Many local residents believe that Room 12a's phantom is the spirit of a young miner who died during the cave-in of a shaft which once wound beneath the hotel. And the haunting continues. In May 2005 I spoke to the Imperial's latest owner, Rae Hampson. 'Three of the rooms here seem to be the focus of the activity,' she told me. 'There's Room 12a of course - my cat goes ballistic if I so much as open the door. Then there's Room 16 where apparitions have also been reported - and Room 7, in which people say they've smelt an aroma like someone smoking a pipe. In my time here there's also been an image in a mirror - a red-haired woman walking up and down.

You can see her reflected and sometimes hear her footsteps. I tend to think it's an old lady who died in the hotel: a former owner named Tess Delaney.'

Ravenswood's rogue spirits do not confine themselves to the Imperial Hotel. The once-booming gold settlement, dominated by tall chimneys and headframes from old mine workings, is reputed to be more deeply haunted than any other Australian town. Phantoms have been reported everywhere, from the cemetery and the abandoned bakery to the local Catholic Church, said to be touched by the spirit of a one-legged priest whose cane is allegedly heard tapping on the wooden floors. (See panel on page 205.)

At its commercial peak Ravenswood's population was 5000. By 2005 that had shrunk to 400.

Or a possible 430 - if you count the ghosts.

Photograph of a Phantom

On 2 April 1984 a Melbourne clergyman, Reverend Tony Russell, led a group of investigators to the Clarkefield Hotel in rural Victoria. The previous month an invisible entity had allegedly injured the publican so severely he was admitted to hospital. Russell and his team hoped to gather photographic and audio evidence that a spectre or spectres existed. They were successful.

The bluestone Clarkefield inn, built in 1857, had been haunted for at least a century. According to newspaper reports and to local lore, a multiplicity of discarnate spirits dwelled on the premises. Research into the hotel's history showed that late in the 19th century a guest murdered his retarded eight-year-old daughter, dumping her corpse in a well behind the stables. Several years earlier, when the building was a Cobb and Co coachstop, bushrangers had robbed five guards of a gold shipment then killed them in an upstairs room. Also among the dead was a Chinese miner, found hanged after a brawl.

In March 1984 - only four days after he took charge of the Clarkefield hotel - publican Frank Nelson experienced his own brutal encounter with the unknown. An exceedingly unusual report published on the front page of Melbourne's *Herald* newspaper pictured Frank, his leg encased in thick plaster, describing how a 'violent ghost' had hurled him down a steep stairwell. When I subsequently spoke to 48-year-old Frank at the hotel he was still clearly shaken:

> *'I never had the faintest belief in ghosts till I moved into this place. But I had a fairly abrupt change of mind at about three o'clock on the morning of March 11. My wife Sharon and I were asleep upstairs when we were woken by noises in the front bar. We could hear people walking around - and bottles and glasses being rattled. Imagining we had intruders I tiptoed to the top of the landing and started down.*
>
> *'Suddenly, from the top of the stairway I felt a blast of icy-cold air. Next, I was shoved in the back, with colossal force. I grabbed the banister, but the rail seemed to be gone. When I hit the deck I turned to see who had pushed me. I couldn't believe it. There was no one there. The stairs were completely empty.'* (Similar descriptions of stairwell attacks can be found in the files of psychical research societies in many countries. For a comparable Australian case see Colin McEwan's

account of his ordeal in the Princess Theatre: *Wraiths that Haunt Radio.*)

While her husband lay gasping in pain Sharon Nelson rang for an ambulance. That night, at Western General Hospital in Footscray, a surgeon inserted three steel pins into Frank's fractured ankle. And that was not the end of the ordeal. In the weeks that followed the night noises and other phenomena persisted. The Nelsons, although defiant at first, finally decided to move. Frank said:

> *'In our last week at the Clarkefield, two terrifying things happened. First, when we were lying in bed, the doona flew off. Then something woke me in the night. I could feel a hand moving inside the plaster cast and twisting and wrenching at my broken ankle. I was screaming with pain. For Sharon and me, that was the end of it.'*

Reverend Tony Russell conducted his investigation during the final days of Frank Nelson's time as licensee. The clergyman's support group comprised 21-year-old Tony Russell Jr, audio operators Peter and Cob Simpson and photographer Bill Lawrie. A key moment of the night-long vigil came at 12.22 am when the team heard and recorded 'whistlings, rustlings and mumbled conversations' emerging from within the walls and from the air around them. At 12.23 am a 'deep chill' descended on the watchers. It felt, says Tony Russell's report, 'as though someone had opened a gigantic refrigerator door'. Instinctively Bill Lawrie pointed his Minolta camera at the yawning stairwell.

The result was a photograph of a swirlingly indistinct image resembling a human form, hovering on the stairs. (See photograph.)

At 1.30 am Reverend Russell's researchers 'saw a light moving down the stairs and recorded the unmistakable voice of a child. Its words were indistinct, but plaintive and unhappy.' The report adds, 'From 2 o'clock onward things were moved about. A blanket was lifted from a stack near the back door and thrown across the hall. At 2.17 one of the microphones was moved several feet from the large dish that had been acting as its stand.'

Steve and Deborah Dudley were the Nelsons' successors as licensees. When I spoke with them in July 1984 they agreed that the stairwell (down which Frank had fallen) seemed to be the hub of the haunting. 'Sometimes we feel hot and cold spots on those stairs,' said Deborah. 'From one step to

the next the temperature can change from oven- hot to freezing cold.' Particularly puzzling to the Dudleys were the constant water supply failures. 'The bore water pump stands in a shed with no windows,' Deborah said. 'We keep it padlocked at all times and only Steve and I have a key. Every few days, when the taps run dry, we unlock that shed - to find that someone or something has thrown the switch. It's impossible. It can't be a human doing it, because no one but us can get in there.'

The Dudleys quit after eight months in the job and were succeeded by licensees who reported similar phenomena. And the hotel's guests were not immune. Typical was Margaret Hunter of Mt Gravatt, Queensland, who wrote:

> *I'd never heard of the Clarkefield hotel or of its ghosts. So, for a long time I imagined that the experience I'd undergone there was confined to me.*
>
> *I was driving from Melbourne to Sydney - and, feeling tired, I decided to book a room for the night. The place I settled on, the Clarkefield, looked cool and pleasant and it wasn't long before I was ensconced in an upstairs room. I slept soundly and rose at seven the next morning to shower and get on my way.*
>
> *I was just brushing my hair when I felt a chill, as though someone had flung open the door of a deep-freeze. Deciding to let some warm summer air in I tried to push up the window. It refused to budge. Then something shocking happened. A large jug which had been standing in a washbasin hurtled up into the air and smashed on the floor. What frightened me was that the jug was right at the other end of the room. No movement or vibration from me could have caused it to levitate like that.*
>
> *The image of that flying jug has engraved itself on my memory. It was a relief to learn in later years that other people have had similar experiences in that hotel.*

As happens in many hauntings, the Clarkefield's disturbed spirits eventually fell silent. But locals still wonder why the quaint old building became so particular a focal point for phantoms. One theory advanced to explain the multiplicity of ghosts reported in hotels is that a far greater number of deaths occur amongst their constantly changing populations than in the average building. Most parapsychologists believe that when a guest, employee or family member dies violently the event can resonate for generations:

- In March 1993 staff at the Plough Inn, an old Brisbane hostelry, complained to me that ‘something’ was interfering with pumping equipment in a securely sealed coldroom. ‘Every night, when trading is over, we routinely turn off the main beer taps, then lock the room,’ an employee, Shawn Mullen, said. ‘But puzzlingly, when we’re preparing for opening time next day, we find the taps have quite inexplicably been returned to their “on” positions. We’ve checked it out often - and we all agree there’s no way anyone could be getting into that room overnight.’ (Earlier in this chapter, Clarkefield hotel nominee Deborah Dudley describes a markedly similar case concerning a bore water pump repeatedly switched off inside a locked shed.)
- Neither the Plough’s staff nor its owners could imagine what the intruder’s provenance might be - until a postgraduate student reviewed the hotel’s history and offered them something to speculate about. The researcher discovered that the original owners, William and Selina Brown, had tragically lost their teenage daughter in 1893, when she was a drowned in a flood. ‘We tend to think she might be the one who’s still hanging around here and playing the tricks on us,’ Shawn Mullen said.
- Another example of violent death resonating within a hotel’s walls was described in Sydney’s *Sunday Telegraph* (16 February 1997). When one of the city’s earliest inns, the Dundee Arms (built 1849), was incorporated into the Hotel Nikko complex on Sussex Street, the dust and clamour reportedly triggered a tornado of paranormal activity. ‘The work was noisy enough to wake the dead - and it did!’ wrote journalist Phillip Koch. He quoted a staff member, Nadine Mitchell, as saying that the ghost manifested itself in many ways, from unlocking and slamming doors to ripping out air vents and switching on electrical devices.
- While seeking a key to the haunting’s history Nadine learned that a brothelkeeper had beaten a 20- year-old prostitute to death in the building during the late 19th century. An architect directing the renovations said he had seen the apparition of a young woman in a shimmering dress floating along a corridor. Sanjay Gandhi, the beverage manager, encountered the entity in a basement, where it manifested itself as a series of loud, invisible footsteps, followed by a gust of icy wind.
- Throughout 1986 the infrared alarm system installed in Perth’s Leederville Hotel went off frequently at night, obliging the manager and staff to leave their beds and look for intruders. They could never find

anyone. Electricians, summoned to search for faults, invariably reported that the system was in good order. The burgeoning mystery prompted one theorist to speculate that the culprit might be Kanga, the phantom of a betting shop manager who had died in the hotel's tower bedroom, his home for 30 years. Over the decades, Kanga had manifested himself to countless people in the hotel's corridors, usually in the reported form of a 'shadow' or 'outline' - and it seemed conceivable now that he was seeking a little more attention.

- The staff, deciding that any idea was worth trying, held a conference at which they compiled a note to Kanga. It read, 'We know you like to walk around the hotel. We know you like to look and make sure everyone is safe and secure - but please try not to set off the alarms.' The note, with the ballpoint pen that had written it, was left overnight on a table in Kanga's tower room. Next morning the pen remained undisturbed, but the pad was gone. From that time the alarms were silent.

‘Ghost Room’ Ripped From Queensland Church

During the 1960s the Catholic Church hired contrac- tors to remove a room from its long-established church in Ravenswood, Queensland.

The diocese declined to discuss the decision - but rumours swept the town that church officials had been desperately trying to ‘get rid of the ghost’ that haunted the small bedroom near the sacristy. So troublesome was the phantom that the bishop of Townsville reportedly sent an exorcist to remove it. But his efforts - like those of the demolitionists - failed. The entity, said to be that of a shuffling priest with a tapping cane, continues to disturb Ravenswood residents to the present day. (The building now is used by a range of religions.)

Talk of the ghost became so widespread that the *Townsville Catholic News* (December 1961) uncharac- teristically devoted an entire page to it. The report revealed that:

- ‘A priest, stationed at Ravenswood, rushed one night to a neighbour’s house and banged on the door, yelling to be let in. He was tremb- ling… and appeared to be on the verge of a stroke. He refused to say what was the cause of his fear (but) one fact is certain: he would never again sleep in the sacristy.’
- ‘One priest (from Charters Towers) brought his dog Bobby…The night at Ravenswood was made comfortable for Bobby: a nice clean bag on the floor in the sacristy just inside the door leading to the Sanctuary of the church. The dog made himself at home, and his master went across the landing to the little lean-to bedroom. The priest woke, hearing noises. He was not alarmed, but waiting for Bobby to bring down the roof with his usual vigorous bark. (But) Bobby rushed out of the sacristy, jumped the landing into the bedroom and dived under his master’s bed.
- The priest shone his torch…the dog was trembling, his bristly hair on end and whingeing like a frightened child. This was too much for his master and there was a race for the back yard.’
- ‘A Redemptorist missioner went to Ravenswood with a high-ranking prelate. They proposed to stay the night and say Mass for the Sisters in

the morning. The priest occupied a stretcher in the sacristy. During the night he heard steps (which) came to the sacristy door several times and turned back. Suddenly the steps ceased at the door of the sanctuary and he got the sensation there was someone in the room. The old tripod washbasin moved and there were other noises. At breakfast next morning at the Convent he remarked to his companion, "I thought I heard you walking in the church last night." Immediately the Sisters were all ears. "Did you see it, Father? Did you speak to it?"

- '"Speak to what?" he asked. "The ghost," they said.'

In July 2005 I spoke to a retired priest, Father Maurice Casey. 'In my time the local Ravenswood people and the church authorities were very tightlipped about the phenomenon,' he said. 'But as I remember it, that newspaper article was correct. People were always talking about the strange happenings in that room near the sacristy and elsewhere in the church for that matter.

'I don't think anyone has actually seen anything - to my knowledge it's always sounds and sensations. I was connected with a couple of happenings myself. On one occasion I heard footsteps coming down the aisle when no one was visibly there - and then, shuffling sounds like someone getting in and out of their seat.

'On another occasion, two friends of mine stayed at the old church and ended up fleeing in terror. I'll never forget the *burn* one of them suffered. When he and his companion heard the footsteps approaching them, he was so frightened he clamped down on his lighted cigarette. He felt no pain at the time. Only later did he show us the deep burn between his fingers.'

Spectres of the Sea

Sickness, Death, Stalk a Sinister Shipwreck

In 1963 the notoriously accident-prone freighter Alkimos was *ripped apart by reefs on the Western Australian coast. The rusting wreck, standing offshore in shallow water, gradually became a lure for sightseers. But many, having visited once, insisted that they would never go back - citing strange shifting shapes on the decks and uncanny clamourings from below. Tourists who drove down to the beach to photograph the hulk found that their cars refused to start again. News spread that* Alkimos *was infested by unfriendly entities which brought misfortune to those who ventured near…*

ACCORDING TO A MARITIME SUPERSTITION, only ill-luck can result from altering a ship's name. The vessel that eventually became the Greek freighter *Alkimos* was renamed twice. Its changes of identity preceded a long series of terrifying events.

Alkimos began life in 1943 as one of 2750 Liberty ships built by the US Government to carry wartime supplies to Allied ports. The shipyards that produced the prefabricated 'Liberties' prided themselves on finishing each within 10 days - but the future *Alkimos* went through six weeks of mishaps before she was complete. Intended for American use she was originally christened the *George M. Shriver*. But mere days after the name was painted on her hull, military authorities changed their minds and assigned her to the Norwegians, who called her the *Viggo Hanstein.*

The ship's troubles began almost immediately. While she rested in port during a blackout a crewman murdered the radio operator, then killed himself. Travelling with U-boat-assailed convoys through the Atlantic she broke down so often that she became a danger to accompanying vessels. When peace was declared in 1945 the United States sold off its Liberty ships. A Greek trading company acquired *Viggo Hanstein* at a bargain price - renaming her *Alkimos.*

Between voyages the crew turnover on *Alkimos* was close to 100 per cent. Sailors believed the ship was jinxed and that it was causing them to fall ill or to suffer bad luck. The decks, they said, were haunted by an evil spirit, which they most commonly described as a huge brooding man in oilskins.

In March 1963, while being towed through calm seas for repairs, the luckless cargo vessel broke away from her tug and drifted onto reefs north of Perth. In its new, permanent home the disembowelled *Alkimos* slowly degenerated into a rusting hulk with an increasingly evil reputation. Visitors who ventured out to the wreck claimed that the contact had brought them misfortune, ranging from mysterious illnesses to the accidental deaths and suicides of family members.

- One 'victim' of the wrecked ship was the sporting champion Herbert Voigt, who in March 1969 tried to become the first person to swim the 20 kilometres from Perth to Rottnest. He vanished during the attempt - and an air-sea search failed to find his body. Four years later his skull

(identified by dental records) was found lodged in the hull of the *Alkimos.* His planned route had gone nowhere near the crippled freighter.

- Soon after *Alkimos* ran aground Wayne Morgan, an American exchange student, was employed as caretaker to deter looters. Instead he ended by panicking and locking himself in his cabin. To the medical staff at Geraldton Regional Hospital he described terrifying days and nights in which an immense misty figure walked the deck - and recalled how locked cabin doors had opened and closed unaided. The married couple who succeeded Morgan in the job described similar occurrences. They quit the ship after the pregnant wife fell, losing her baby.
- The malign power of *Alkimos* touched anyone who tried to salvage her. Crewmen suffered burns, broken bones, slipped discs and family deaths far beyond statistical likelihood. In 1969 a fire inexplicably broke out while salvagers were dismantling the hulk, forcing them to swim to safety. Twelve unsuccessful attempts to salvage the wreck were made between 1963 and 1970. Tugs were damaged and burst into flames. Salvage company owners died or went bankrupt.

Perhaps the most impressive evidence concerning the hex-cum-haunting has been gathered by the legendary Perth diver Jack Sue. His association with the wreck began when, as host of the TV program ‘Down Under’ he spent a night aboard the ship with a film crew and several fellow divers. Jack, a doubter at the time, was determined to prove that ‘nothing supernatural was going on’. He and his sceptical friends were quickly forced to change their minds. Early in their visit group-members were astonished to hear footsteps and sneezes resonating from a section of the ship they knew to be empty. One diver felt a man brush past him - then watched, horrified, as a towering, oilskin-clad figure passed through a solid-steel bulkhead. Jack Sue himself, who would subsequently publish a *book Ghost of the Alkimos,* heard someone rolling over in the empty bunk opposite him.

The divers regretted their night of ghostbusting. One lost his business. Another’s girlfriend died in a plane crash. Jack Sue collapsed the day after he came ashore from the *Alkimos.* He subsequently spent almost a year in hospital with an illness doctors could not diagnose. And that was not the end of his baleful association with the ship. In March 1997 - a month that plays a significant role in the haunted freighter’s history - he broke a self-imposed

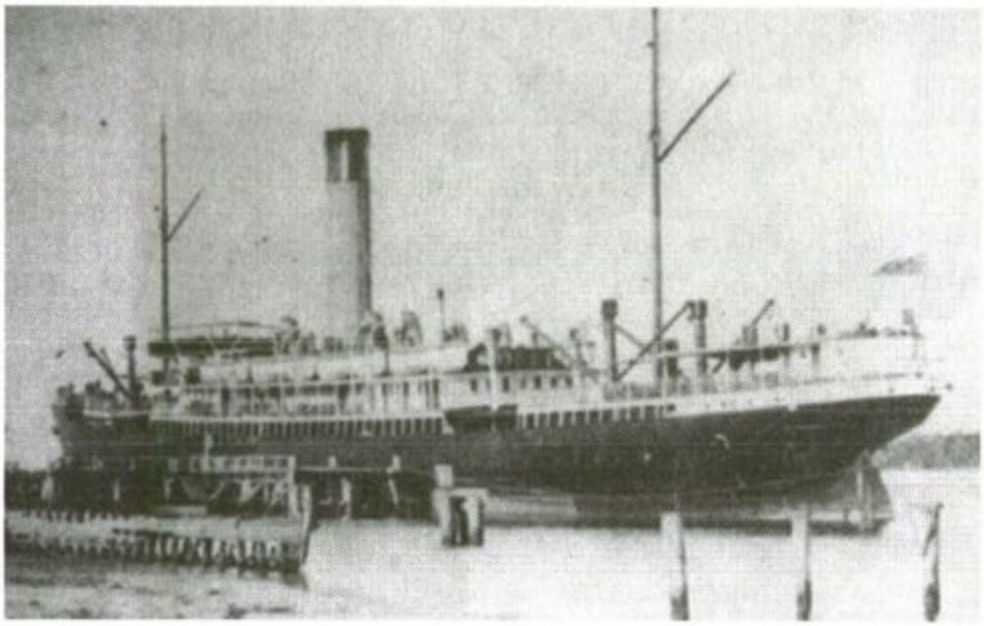
vow to have nothing more to do with *the Alkimos.* Decades after making the pledge he walked down to the stretch of beach that offered the clearest view of the hulk. Shortly afterward he suffered a severe stroke.

In an interview published in Sydney's *Sun-Herald* (18 January 1998) Jack Sue said, 'It's probably just coincidence, but you can never tell with *the Alkimos.* I can't help thinking of the number of people who've driven down that beach in four-wheel drives to photograph the wreck and had their cars break down, or their cameras fail, or their watches stop. That ship is bad luck.'

The Ghost Ship that Haunted

Queensland's Coast

On 23 March 1911 the luxuriously appointed passenger and freight ship *SS Yongala* set out from Mackay for Townsville. Aboard were 122 people comprising the 62-year-old master Captain William Knight, his 72 crew and 49 passengers. Amongst the cargo bound for northern ports was a racehorse, *Moonshine,* and a red Lincolnshire bull.



The *Yongala,* at Cairns in 1910. Early the following year she sank in a cyclone, drowning 122 passengers and crew.

The ship was still in sight of land when the Mackay signal station received a telegram warning of an approaching cyclone. The previous month the owners, Adelaide Steamship Company, had bought Captain Knight the latest safety equipment: a wireless receiver-transmitter built by the Marconi company in England.

The apparatus was at sea en route to Australia when the *Yongala,* unwarned, sailed into the cyclone's eye and sank, drowning all aboard. The only body found was that of racehorse *Moonshine,* washed up on a beach at Gordon Creek near Townsville. For 47 years the *Yongala* lay unknown and unvisited on seafloor in the area of the Great Barrier Reef. Then, in 1958

George Konrad, a Cairns salvage contractor, spotted the ship, dived to her resting place and established her identity by finding the barnacled name on her bow.

Captain Bob Hallam often recalled the afternoon when, as a boy, he stood on the deck of his father's trading ketch and watched the *Yongala* steam past on what would be her final voyage.

Hallam also insisted that 12 years later - in 1923 - he and a fishing companion clearly saw the vessel sailing past again - whereupon it inexplicably vanished.

The captain was a man of such credibility that the story of his 'ghost ship' sighting circulated through Queensland and beyond. The author George Farwell heard about Hallam's experience, tracked him down and interviewed him for the *Age.* Farwell wrote, in part:

> *For years, men along the coast speculated about what had happened (to the Yongala). Some argued that she was top-heavy, and foundered in the cyclone. Others said she was light of ballast. But Captain Knight was one of the most experienced skippers in those waters, and it seemed unlikely that he would have taken an unseaworthy vessel to sea…There were even conflicting theories about where she lay.*
>
> *Captain Hallam believes he knows the answers.*
>
> *In 1923, twelve years (after* Yongala *disappeared) he was fishing with two other men off Holburn Island, which lies some two miles east of Bowen. They were trolling for mackerel, keeping out on the western side of the island. There are no other islands in the vicinity. As their launch passed the southern end of the island, he saw a ship standing out beyond the point. One of his companions saw it, too.*
>
> *They agreed afterwards that she looked very old and rusty. She was almost bow on, but they could see foremast and funnel. The third man had not bothered to look up; after all, ships are nothing unusual in that region. They continued fishing up and down, keeping a lookout for the ship when she ran clear of the top end of the island. But she never appeared.*
>
> *Thinking she must have dropped anchor, they cruised round to the eastern side of the island, wondering what the trouble was. There was nothing there. Only empty seas stretching away to the skyline. Hallam*

admits that it may have been some trick of the imagination; perhaps a hallucination. But if so, how had one of his friends seen it, too?

Another ten years passed. Once more he was fishing with a party off Holburn Island. Some miles to the east they spotted a heavy discoloration in the water, although charts indicated that it was very deep there. Nor was there mention of any shoal or reef. It was only then he realised that this was the exact spot where he had seen the mysterious rust-covered ship. On his return he reported what he had seen to the naval authorities. In such an important shipping lane it was essential that any submerged object be charted. But the naval vessel sent to investigate could find no trace…Some time later, a naval survey ship using Asdic and echo-sounding equipment did locate an 'obstruction,' lying in fifteen fathoms of water. Its nature has not yet been identified. Nor has there been any explanation of Hallam's 'hallucination.'

A long-sunken ship could hardly rise from the depths and sink again. Was it a material ship they saw? Why should it have so closely resembled the lines of the Yongala, or have appeared in that very place? Captain Hallam is a seaman. He does not pretend to know.

Drowned Woman's Wraith

Over the past four centuries more than 7000 ships have perished in wild seas and on jagged rocks around Australia's coastline. In the absence of anyone else to perform the task, early settlers routinely buried the corpses of sailors and passengers washed ashore. With the proliferation of ad hoc cemeteries came reports of lights floating near roughly marked graves, and of dune-roaming ghosts - accounts which persist into the present day.

At the beginning of the 21st century, local newspapers chronicled sightings of a 'female apparition' wearing a white flowing dress, in Norah Heads on the NSW central coast. Journalist Greig Berry, writing in the *Newcastle Herald* (5 May 2003), recalled the stir the phenomenon created:

> *Locals called (the apparition) the Ghost of Jenny Dixon, as many sightings of her were made at night along the stretch of beach known as Jenny Dixon. Stories came from locals and tourists alike. A doctor from Victoria told police he was about to pick up the woman in white but she vanished as he stopped beside her.*
>
> *Another sighting of her was in the spring of 1990, when she spooked a group of teenagers camped on the beach. The spokesperson for the group said the woman was wearing a long white gown. There were several theories as to who (she) was. In 1950 two young sisters were bashed to death on a walking trip to the lighthouse. Their bodies were found in a swamp known as "the jungle." Another story talks of a local teenager who was raped and murdered in the 1950s.*
>
> *There was…the thought that she was the captain's wife from the* Esperanza - *a brig wrecked on Bird Island in 1868. Ten of the crew died in horrific circumstances as the ship was pounded to pieces by the huge surf. The sole survivor, Peter Moss, was found on the beach…and told a tale of horror about watching the captain's wife and young child being swept back and forth across the deck, screaming, before being washed over the side.*

Of all the theories advanced to explain the Woman in White's identity, the most compelling, in the minds of many locals, is that she is the tragic wife of the *Esperanza's* captain - trudging the beaches in search of the daughter with whom she drowned, 137 years ago.

Haunted Lighthouses

Exhumed and Angry: Pine Islet's Turbulent Ghost

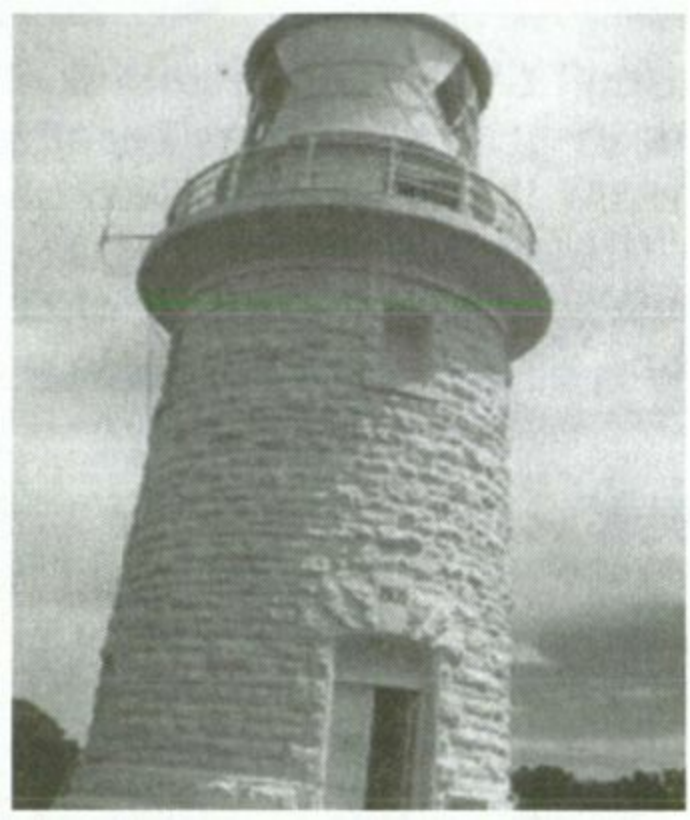
In October 1927, builders on a remote Queensland island dug up an old grave to lay foundations for a lighthouse keeper's cottage. The men little dreamed of the hideous haunting that would follow: a series of unnerving disturbances that persisted for more than half a century…

PINE ISLET, 130 KILOMETRES SOUTH-EAST OF MACKAY, was a peaceful place - until Queensland authorities decided to build a new cottage for the lighthouse keeper.

Pine, a narrow granite landmass only 800 metres long, offered few options to a prospective builder - and after much thought the contractor was forced to an uncomfortable conclusion. The only flat land on the island that would properly meet his needs was a 19th century gravesite. Reluctantly he sought the lighthouse authority's permission to exhume the inhabitant's long-buried body and relocate the grave. Brisbane bureaucrats acceded to the request - and in early November the builder and his men went carefully and respectfully to work.

The name on the headstone was that of Dorothea McKay, wife of an early lighthouse keeper. She had died of cancer in 1895. When the contractor and his men disturbed her resting place they were distressed to find that the cheap coffin had rotted away. All that remained in the pit were a collapsed skeleton, a few loose bones, a set of false teeth and a wedding ring. The workers collected the remains and associated items and buried them elsewhere on the islet. When their task was complete, they said a brief prayer. Apparently Dorothea was not impressed.

From the first day it was occupied the new cottage, built squarely on Dorothea's grave, was a cauldron of unpleasant phenomena. The keeper and his wife were repeatedly woken at night by loud rappings in the walls and at the door. When they went to answer, no one was there. Often they heard a woman weeping, or at other times furiously muttering to herself. At intervals loud footsteps shook the cottage - and on several occasions they noticed the fleeting image of a female face at the window.



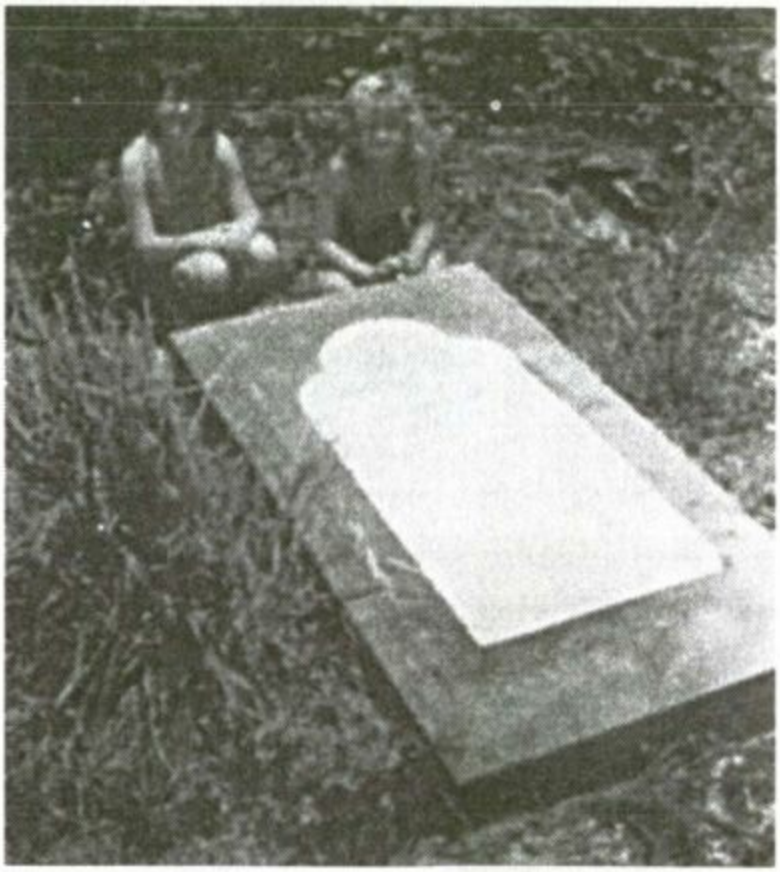
Large numbers of Australia's isolated lighthouses are reputedly plagued by ghosts.

For more than 50 years the haunting made life tense, and sometimes miserable, for the keepers and their families. In a letter to the *Lighthouses of Australia Bulletin* (March 2000) one witness, Peter Braid, recalled:

> *Pine Islet was the first lighthouse we lived on [in 1974] and we had many encounters with the ghost over the two years we lived there… There was one room in particular in the house that she seemed to prefer and we were led to believe that it was over the top of her original grave site. Not long after they moved her grave the marble slab cracked from one end to the other and not long after that she made her first appearance. There are supposedly ghosts on quite a few of the Queensland lights, but we only had encounters with them on Pine and Booby islands.*

In a further letter Peter's sister Sharon Fielden added:

> *We lived in the 'haunted house' on Pine Islet…Every night my mother would close the doors of the cupboards throughout the house and in the morning they would all be open again. I'm not sure who started it, but they were known as coffin cupboards!*



Peter and Sharon Braid had numerous brushes with Pine Islet's tortured phantom (thought to be Dorothea McKay, died 1895). In this 1974 family snap they sit beside her relocated grave.

In the early 1980s, the haunting abruptly ended. Pine Islet's beacon had been automated - and the last keeper, Darrell Roche, was preparing to leave. 'The last time the ghost came was about 18 months ago,' he said. 'There was no knock on the door - only footsteps through the cottage into the lounge room. There she stopped - above her original grave - and we've heard nothing from her since.'

It's tempting to surmise that Dorothea McKay had felt able at last to return to the burial place in which she had once peacefully lain.

Glass-Shattering Spectres

Entities that assume the form of floating faces, and create noises resembling shattering glass, have disturbed keepers of Victoria's Wilsons Promontory lighthouse since the early 1870s. The remote beacon, standing on a bleak rocky outcrop, is now solar-powered and automated - but the high-tech equipment has done nothing to discourage the old structure's unofficial residents.

Particularly sensitive to the haunting were former CSIRO plant scientist Keith Chapman and his wife Gill, who looked after the light from 2001 to 2004, guiding more than 3000 ships past the Prom's jagged rocks and islands. From their first night on duty the middle-aged couple were beset by uncanny phenomena. Reporter Danny Buttler, who interviewed the pair for the *Herald Sun* (11 September 2004), wrote:

> *The couple knew they were well-suited to the job long before they arrived at the lighthouse. Even the spectre of ghosts has not been enough to dim (their) enthusiasm.*
>
> *Several incidents have left the Chapmans convinced lighthouse keepers of old have returned to pay them a visit. 'It was the first night we'd been here by ourselves,' Gill says. 'We heard this door open and shut, we checked it and went back to bed but a few minutes later it did it again. Then we heard this great shattering of glass. We went out to look at what had smashed but we never found anything broken.*
>
> *On other occasions, in the company of guests, the pair have heard breaking glass or witnessed other unexplained phenomena. 'People have seen shadows going across the windows, but no one has felt threatened by it,' Keith says.*

Island’s Secret Ghost

For 80 years, successive keepers of the lighthouse on tiny Lady Elliot Island managed to keep a disquieting secret. Their workplace - the southernmost speck of coral on Queensland’s Great Barrier Reef - was troubled by what most witnesses agreed was a tormented spirit.

The beacon’s guardians were in little doubt about the earthly identity of their island ghost, which appeared as a woman shimmeringly dressed in white. But a deep conservatism, born of the isolation in which the men lived, and the belief that certain topics were unsuitable for discussion, stilled their tongues.

First to break the taboo was young Margaret Brumpton, daughter of lighthouse keeper Arthur Brumpton. Margaret’s life on the 43-hectare cay, with its vast underwater coral gardens, coconut palms and brilliantly coloured tropical birds, was an idyll other teenagers would have envied.

But shortly after her 15th birthday, a shadow fell. ‘I was climbing the lighthouse stairs when I *felt* something close to me,’ she later recalled. ‘I was filled with the terrible knowledge that it - whatever it was - wanted to push me down those stairs.’ Margaret fled from the lighthouse, to tell her parents. They tried to persuade her that she had imagined the experience.

Not until a decade later did Arthur Brumpton concede that he had misled his daughter. ‘I was well acquainted with the ghost myself,’ he said, ‘but I didn’t want to frighten the family by admitting to it.’ Along with others on Lady Elliot Island, Mr Brumpton had seen the woman-in-white half-walking, half-floating between the lighthouse and the keeper’s cottage. Like Margaret he had also encountered her on the lighthouse stairs. Always she wore the same white shimmering gown, in an early 20th century style.

Arthur Brumpton confided his experiences to the captain of a supply ship. Intrigued, the captain went to his cabin to retrieve an official album containing photographs of keepers and their wives who had served on Lady Elliot Island. Mr Brumpton immediately recognised one of the women, Susannah McKee, as the apparition he had encountered on the lighthouse stairway.

Eventually most of the lighthouse workers began to abandon their code of secrecy. Not only had the old repressive climate changed, making it acceptable to debate such matters, but the spectre had suddenly become more

aggressive (the result, some believed, of automation in the lighthouse). Everyone - staff and visitors - were convinced they knew the spectre's identity. A manager, Steve Heath, expressed the general view. 'Most people here believe the ghost could be Susannah McKee, the wife of a keeper,' he said. 'She drowned herself by jumping off the jetty - and visitors and staff are still seeing her and feeling her presence.'

According to historians, Susannah was born in Ballyganaway, Ireland. She married Tom McKee and bore him four sons, subsequently accompanying him, with the youngest boy, to Lady Elliot. To a woman accustomed to the soft light of her homeland, the harsh glare of tropical Queensland was barely endurable. She felt oppressed by the bleak ruggedness of the island and the discomforts of her life there. Food supplies, brought by ship, were invariably late. Meat and fruit rotted within days of arrival. The hut in which she and her family existed was jerrybuilt and windswept. When it was time for her youngest son to leave for boarding school in Rockhampton, Susannah, tortured by loneliness, decided to end her life. On 23 April 1907 she donned her best clothes, walked out onto the antique guano-loading jetty below the lighthouse and jumped into the sea. Her clothes were heavy and she had never learned to swim.

Tom McKee was promptly dogged by accusations that he had pushed his wife into the water. But nothing could be proved - and he did all in his power to present the appearance (or reality) of grief. He buried Susannah on a hilltop in the centre of the island - placing her beside a grave occupied by Phoebe Phillips, a lighthouseman's daughter who had died of pneumonia 13 years earlier.

Susannah did not rest quietly. Her 'turbulent spirit', as one historian described it, would appear to countless island visitors and staff through the 20th century and beyond. The disturbances became particularly intense in 1987, shortly after the lighthouse was automated. The trouble began soon after the outgoing keeper handed over three cottages to Tali Birkmanis, the new resort's operations manager. Birkmanis, who had heard little about the ghost, was shocked by what happened next.

He assigned one of the cottages to a resort groundsman, Jeff Raynor, and chef Chris Lister. After arranging their furniture the two men enjoyed a brief rest on a tractor parked outside the unoccupied building. Without warning an empty plastic icecream container exploded from the front door and landed at their feet. Several nights later, 'something powerful' hurled Jeff

from his bed and onto the floor. Bruised and unnerved he slept, from that time, on the verandah. But this precaution failed to prevent further alarms. Several nights later he woke suddenly to see the transparent figure of a woman standing in the cottage doorway.

The arrival of visitors seemed to spark Susannah into a frenzy of poltergeist activity. Contractors engaged to repaint the cottages complained that their scaffolding shook violently every time they ascended it. When they stepped down the shaking stopped. In the locked, empty generator room, stored kerosene tins were heard crashing about. The generators then stopped abruptly, pitching the resort into darkness. But before anyone could open the door, they started again. (Similar phenomena in sealed rooms have been described by staff at Victoria's Clarkefield Hotel and Brisbane's Plough Inn. *See Haunted Inns*, page 195.)

The white-clad woman has also been seen peering from windows in the cottages and striding across the island's small airstrip. Sometimes she is accompanied by a younger female. Theorists wonder whether the new companion could be the phantom of Phoebe Phillips, whose grave lies beside Susannah's.

The ghost of Susannah McKee has at last made its presence dramatically known to a larger audience than it commanded before. The entity must arguably be one of the few apparitions in history to have become the subject of a long-running campaign of denial and evasion. Tony Walsh, author of *Lady Elliot: First Island of the Great Barrier Reef*, described the disavowal of the unhappy phantom as 'a conspiracy of silence'.

He said, 'The lighthouse keepers all knew about it, but they didn't want to talk about it. It wasn't until the lighthouse went automatic that the secret got out.'

Wet Bootprints on the Stairs

On rare occasions, paranormal entities may leave *physical traces* behind them. A case that particularly intrigued psychic investigators centred on the lighthouse built in 1872 at Wollongong Boat Harbour, New South Wales. For many years staff had reported hearing slow, sometimes shuffling footsteps on the stairs. The sounds resonated late at night, when the building was securely locked.

The mystery deepened one summer morning when a keeper unlocked the lighthouse and found large wet bootprints on the steep stairway. The weather was dry - and psychical researchers were unable to find a commonsense explanation for the marks. The phenomenon recurred several times, prompting the popular theory that the stairs were haunted by an early keeper of the lighthouse, George Smith. For many years it had been one of Smith’s duties to climb up to light the lantern.

Phantoms of the Footlights

Princess Theatre Entity ‘Predicted’ a Tragic Fire

During a seance videotaped by Channel 10 in Melbourne’s deeply haunted Princess Theatre, the wineglass spelled out a grim warning of ‘FIRE’. Three days later the uncanny omen apparently came true, with scores of blazes erupting across Victoria - and killing three women in Fairlea prison. The seance’s 400,000 viewers heard the medium say that the ghost guiding the glass was Federici, the dead singer who has stalked the theatre for more than a century. But others on the stage of the Princess that day believed the message had come from an entirely different spirit…

THE EXPERIMENT IN COMMUNICATION beyond the grave was televised in 1983 by the ever-innovative Ten network. The production crew set up their seance on the shadowy, cavernous stage of Melbourne's Princess Theatre, long thought to be haunted by the phantom of English baritone Federici (Frederick Baker). Since he suffered a fatal heart attack on stage on 3 March 1888 there had been several unsuccessful attempts to contact him via a seance. But this was the first time the procedure had been shown on TV.

I (the author of this book) sat in on the seance, along with medium Kerry Kulkens and her 'circle', and actress Kerry Armstrong. Using a felt pen the latter Kerry marked the circular red-topped table with the 26 alphabetical letters, the digits 0 to 9 and the words YES and NO.

Kerry Kulkens, who died while this book was in preparation, then opened proceedings.

As cameras rolled she said, 'If anyone is here, give us a sign.' Almost immediately the wineglass began to move powerfully beneath our lightly resting forefingers. Sometimes it slid across the table at such speed that group members had to stand to keep their fingers in place. (Many parapsychologists believe such movements are caused, not by a 'ghost', but by unconscious surges of telekinetic force from someone at the table.)

Kerry addressed me. 'You're the sceptic about seances,' she said. 'You can ask the questions.'

Accordingly I conducted the following dialogue with the glass:

Who are you?

Glass moves in circles

Are you Federici?

Glass moves forcefully to 'YES'

You died here in 1888. Why have you stayed around this theatre for so long?

Glass moves to letters K, B, N, Z

Can't you spell proper words for us?

No

(Kerry Kulkens said, 'You often pick up garbled messages if two entities are trying to get through.')

Is there something you want to tell us?

Yes

Will you try, then?

Glass moves to A…K…L

We still can't understand you. I'll ask some questions you can answer with yes or no. Are you happy here in the theatre?

Glass circles between YES and NO

One of the group is complaining about a violent pain in her left arm.

Did you hurt your left arm?

No answer

Do you like to be known as Federici?

No

Would you rather we used your real name, Frederick Baker?

Yes

All right Frederick. Do you have any messages for anyone at this table?

Yes…K

Kerry Armstrong?

Yes

What do you want to tell Kerry?

H…A…P…P…Y

Any other message? Is there anything you'd like to tell the people watching this TV program?

Yes…Fire

Is that a warning? When will the fire be?

F…7

At this point several more people complained of unpleasant head and arm pains, prompting Kerry Kulkens to bring the seance to a close. 'There's no doubt we were in touch with an entity,' she said, as we later walked through the deserted auditorium. 'Federici died of heart failure and fell through that stage trapdoor over there. Considering some of us felt such bad pains in the arm - symptoms of a cardiac attack - it's a fair bet it was him we were talking to.'

Federici died of heart failure under Melbourne's Princess Theatre stage in 1888 - and has haunted the premises ever since. ***The Australasian Sketcher***

Not every seance participant accepted Kerry's theory. Several young people who had sat with us on the stage subsequently told me that a much-loved mutual friend had been killed in a motorcycle accident three weeks earlier. They were convinced that although he was still disoriented by the violent nature of his death (as evidenced by the jumbled letters and other confusion in his replies) he had managed to convey one comforting message to them - by suggesting that he was *'H…A…P…P…Y'*.

It was not until several days later, however, that we realised something remarkable had happened during the experiment. The seance had been videotaped on 4 February. Three days later, on 7 February, 98 blazes erupted in Melbourne, giving the city its most disastrous fire day in 20 years. The Sunday newspapers on 7 February were full of stories about a fire that had broken out the previous night at Fairlea Prison, killing three women.

To recapitulate the relevant dialogue:

Any other message? Is there anything you'd like to tell the people

watching this TV program?

Yes…Fire

Is that a warning? When will the fire be?

F…7

The debate began. Was the glass's 'choice' of letter and number a mere coincidence? Or did the message *F…7* refer to February 7 - or Fairlea - or both?

How the Princess Haunting Began

For 117 years, actors, stagehands and patrons have been reporting eerie lights, strange noises and inexplicable occurrences in the Princess Theatre on Melbourne's Spring Street. TV entertainers Bert Newton and Colin McEwan had brushes with a phantom while they were all-night announcers at the Princess-based radio station 3XY. (See *Wraiths that Haunt Radio*, page 56.) I have spoken to numerous performers and theatre staff convinced that they too were touched by the cold breath of the supernatural. Typical was mechanist Jim Sullivan who told me that often, when he was working in the theatre alone at night, he would hear creakings in the circle. 'I get the horrible impression someone is moving about up there,' he said. 'When I check, there's never anyone around - but the noises continue.'

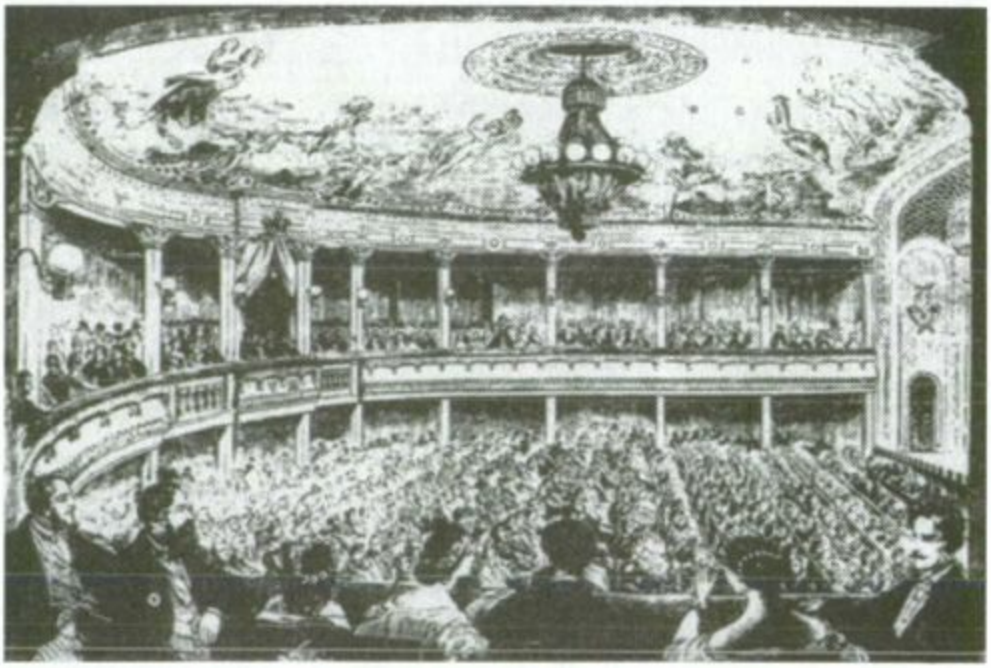
One of the usherettes described an encounter so alarming that she felt she had been 'drenched in freezing water'. She recalled, 'One night during a National Theatre season I was standing on stage when I glimpsed from the corner of my eye the figure of a man in a black suit. I assumed it was Blair Edgar, the singer. I turned to say hello to him - and the figure vanished. I bolted out of the theatre.'

By becoming Australia's most famous ghost, the English baritone F. Federici (born Frederick Baker) achieved greater fame posthumously than he had ever enjoyed in life. In 1887, after appearing in an American Gilbert and Sullivan season Federici sailed to Australia aboard the steamer *Chimborazo.* He was contracted to give a series of performances culminating in his role as Mephistopheles in Gounod's opera *Faust.* The production, mounted by entrepreneurs Williamson, Garner and Musgrove, premiered on 3 March 1888 at the New Princess's Theatre - as the Princess was then known.

At interval, members of the capacity audience pronounced the opera a brilliant success and predicted a long season. Newspaper critics were already amassing adjectives to grace their glowing encomiums. No one dreamed that the performance would end in nightmare.

During his triumphant final aria Mephistopheles wrapped a scarlet cloak around his victim, then, wreathed in smoke and fumes, descended via a stage-trap to a theatrical version of Hell. As the audience applauded and demanded an encore, the curtain fell. The packed theatre waited, but there was no encore. Neither F. Federici nor his supporting cast reappeared to take their

bows. Finally the puzzled patrons, some grumbling, headed for the exits. They would not discover, until they read their newspapers, that Federici had died beneath the stage.



A capacity audience (1888) awaits a performance in the Princess Theatre Melbourne, around the time of Federici's death. ***Illustrated Australian News.***

The *Illustrated Australian News* (31 March 1888) described the confusion and grief that followed. The report read, in part:

> *Nothing more weird and melancholy than this unlooked for and highly sensational occurrence has been recorded in connection with the stage. And yet, this is what occurred at the termination of* Faust *on Saturday, 3 March. Mr F. Federici, the popular baritone, died as the act drop (final curtain) descended. With his red cloak wrapped around Faust, he stood upon the trap by which he sinks from view. The trap by which the descent to the infernal regions is made is worked on a slot, running on an inclined plane, so that the characters disappear gradually and in a slanting direction.*
>
> *As he was disappearing from view, Mr Federici was seen to put his arm before his eyes in a feeble manner, which seemed to indicate that he was completely worn out. The rostrum on which he stood was just reaching the cellar floor when the gasman, who was working the steam pipe, noticed him lean forward as if in a faint. The next instant he had fallen on the man's shoulder, and never spoke again.*
>
> *The men in the cellar carried him up to the Green Room. The scene*

was weird and impressive. The dying actor, in the red costume in which a few moments before he had stood up as the representative of His Satanic Majesty, lay stretched upon the floor, with his wife and anxious friends about him, trying to restore him to life. Dr Wilmott and persons attached to the theatre persisted in their endeavours for up to an hour, but neither the galvanic battery, nor other restoratives, could call the actor back to life.

Mr Federici's death is attributed to disease of the heart, from which he had been suffering for the past nine years. The doctor has advised that the end was accelerated by the nervous excitement under which he laboured while performing a part that cost him much anxiety. Whilst the performance was in progress, the excitement kept him up, but directly he had spoken his last line, the reaction set in.

According to Princess Theatre lore the haunting began shortly after Frederick Baker was buried in Melbourne's General Cemetery. Numerous staff and performers began to claim that they had encountered 'cold spots' on and beneath the stage. Some said they had seen a man's dark figure in the wings and on the stairs of the deserted theatre. Betty Beddoes, who for decades worked as wardrobe mistress, had her sole, memorable encounter with the presence in 1917 during the Alan Wilkie company's season of Sheridan's *School for Scandal.*

She was working at about 3 am preparing costumes for the opening night when a watchman leaned into the doorway and said, 'Come and see a ghost.' Suspecting a joke she accompanied him to the dress circle - where, in 'moderately bright' light they clearly saw a man in evening dress, sitting in the front row and staring at the stage. The figure was motionless, the white shirt glowing brightly. The pair stood staring for what might have been 10 minutes. When nothing further happened they returned to their duties. After finishing work an hour later, Betty Beddoes returned, curious to the dress circle. The figure was still sitting there - and remained visible when she left for home minutes later. 'I was never frightened at any time,' she said.

Other employees were unable to echo her. Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, staff rostered to work late in the empty theatre said they had been 'touched' by invisible hands - or, as in the case of young radio announcer Colin McEwan, pushed from behind by a powerful force. These incidents prompted some investigators to surmise that the Princess might be

home to *several* ghosts, with differing personalities.

Singer Rob Guest has neither seen nor sensed Federici. But while he was performing the eponymous role in *Phantom of the Opera* he received a curious letter from a Melbourne woman who asserted that while sitting in the dress circle she had distinctly seen a man in dated evening dress standing at Guest's shoulder.

When theatrical entrepreneur David Marriner bought the Princess a journalist asked if he would ever consider employing a medium, to persuade the spectral baritone to quit the premises. Marriner deplored the idea, saying, 'It's a privilege to have Federici here and he shouldn't be disturbed. He's a very friendly ghost - and I consider him part of the family.'

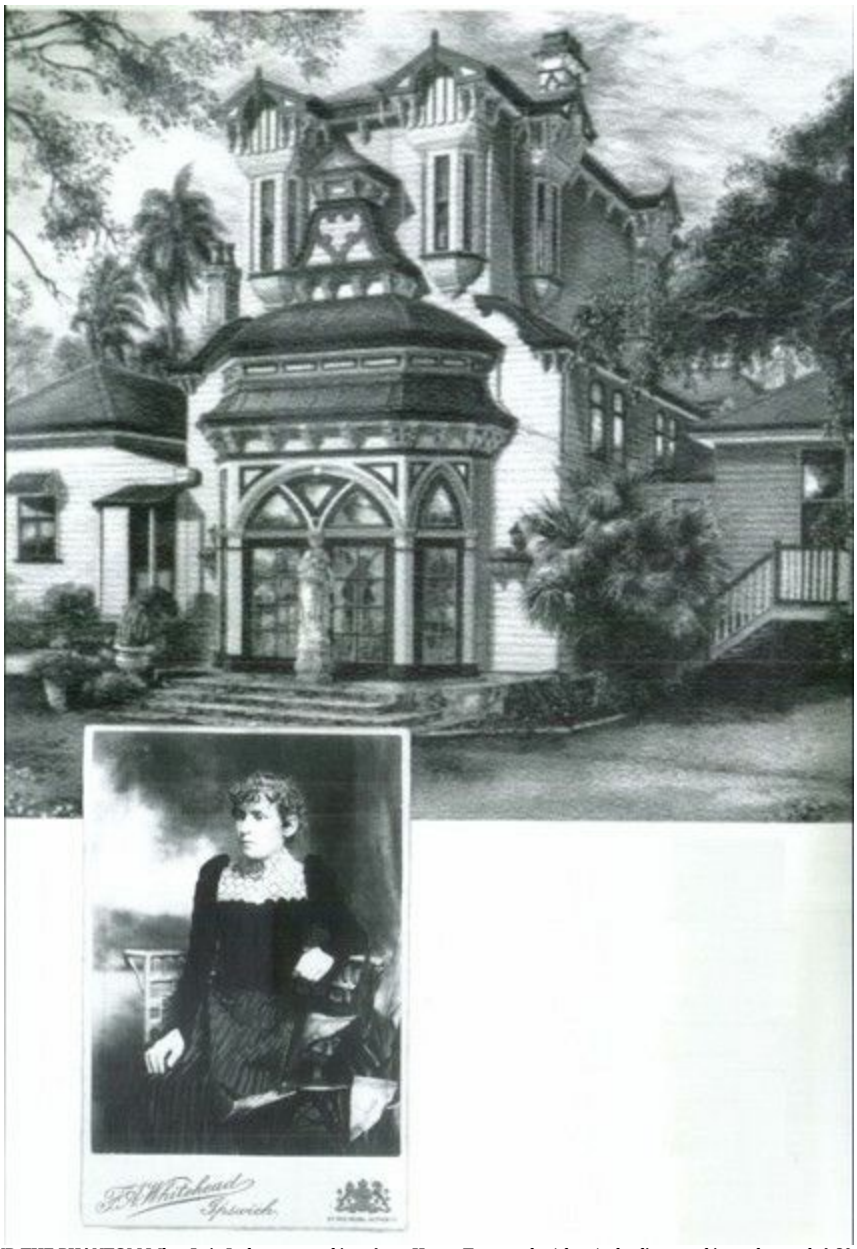
The Deaths that Blighted ‘Blithe Spirit’

For many years the Australian actress Gwen Plumb refused to speak publicly about the ‘evil, malign spirit’ which, she believed, had almost ended her career. Ultimately she agreed to tell me her story (which was well known in the theatrical world) in the hope it might serve as ‘some kind of warning’ to other performers:

> *‘After a reasonably quiet few years devoted mainly to television, I accepted the stage role of Madam Arcati, the medium in Noel Coward’s* Blithe Spirit. *I had a few qualms about signing - having read somewhere, years before, that spirits dislike being mocked. But it’s a marvellous comedy, frankly far too tempting to refuse - so in the end I went ahead.*
>
> *‘Right from the start, though, I wondered if I’d made a wise decision. While driving to the first day’s rehearsal I smashed into the rear of a Bentley. I arrived at the theatre badly shaken. And my unease grew worse several days later when a car driven by someone else in the cast, Jess Noad, was hit by a maniac speeding through a red light. That was just the beginning. Shortly after the play began, Judi Farr, who played Ruth, was knocked over by a car while crossing the road. She had no understudy, so she performed that night in bandages.*
>
> *‘After that the deaths began. Friends I’d known for years - including my dear mates Noel Brophy and Ronnie Frazer - began dying all around me. As all this was happening in the context of a highly successful season I kept right on rationalising - putting everything down to a horrible, but essentially coincidental, run of ill-luck.*
>
> *‘But then came the stench - and it changed my views completely. One night I walked into my dressing room to find it was filled with what I can only call the smell of hell. No one could trace its source - but it was a terrible musty burning odour that scared everyone who came near it. The stench started to spread to other parts of the theatre and everyone was fearful it would drive audiences away.*
>
> *‘That’s when the exorcist was called in - a woman who conducted a very powerful ceremony, and urged me to call on the protective help of good spirits like Ronnie and Noel. I took her advice. She also urged me*

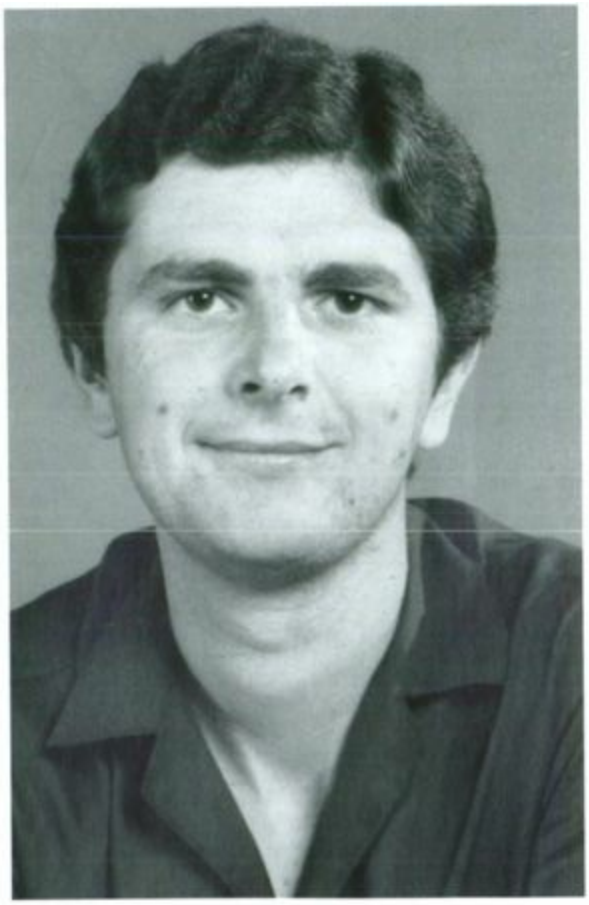
to recite the 23rd psalm, The Lord is My Shepherd, *every night before going on stage.*

'The exorcism worked. The smells and the deaths stopped. But I don't think I'd ever dare to act again in a comedy about seances. I know that I became the target of something so evil, so malign, that I'm amazed I survived it.'



THE FOLLY AND THE PHANTOM When Lois Jackman moved into Ascot House, Toowoomba (above), she discovered it was haunted. A 20-year investigation finally led her to a 19th-century coroner's report describing the tragic death of household servant Maggie Hume (left) who many believe lingers in the premises. The baroque folly was added to Ascot House, also pictured on page 12, by a wealthy previous owner.

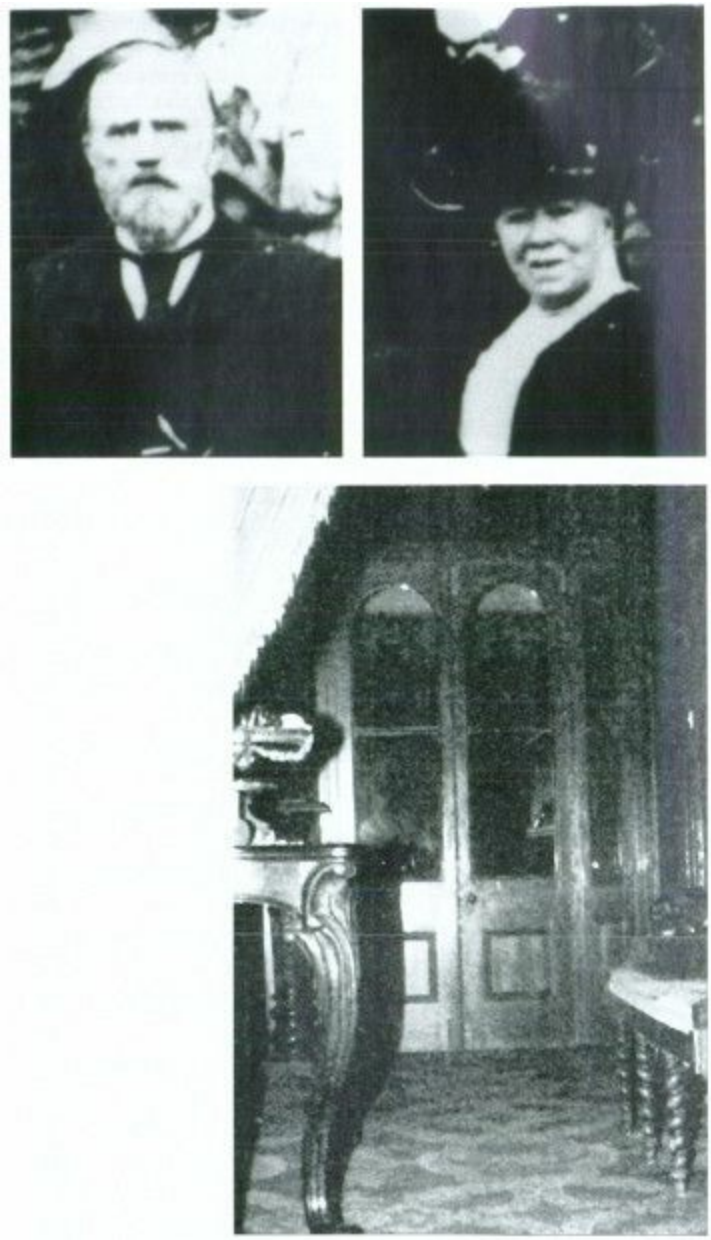
STRANGLED SPECTRE The ghost of a theological student who suicided in 1930 troubled Pepper Film and TV Studios in Kent Town, South Australia (above) for several years. Employees said the intruder habitually emerged from behind the multi-track recording machine.



ANNOUNCER BRIAN MARKOVIC (right) was one of many 3UZ Melbourne staff who heard an 'invisible pianist' playing in the station's pitch-black auditorium. The station, then in Bourke Street, occupied a building used as a brothel in the 19th century.

DEAD NEWSREADER RETURNED When David Mann [left] was a young announcer at Melbourne's 3AW he encountered, in the station's corridors, the apparition of a newsreader who had died on-air of heart failure, decades earlier. Many other staff-members also saw the phantom. ***Courtesy 3AW***

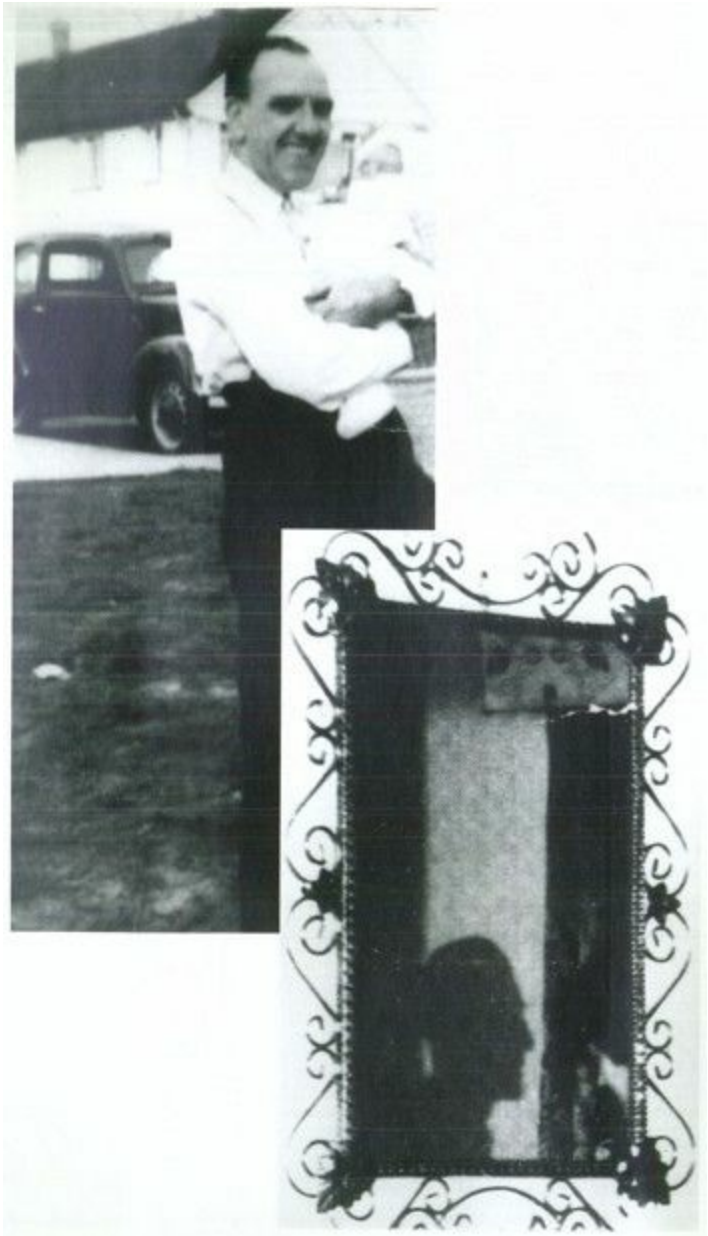
CLOCK MYSTERIOUSLY STOPPED Adelaide radio announcer Judith Barr (above) recalls that on the day her uncle died his favourite cedar-cased clock inexplicably malfunctioned, resisting all attempts to restart it. But the sequel to this event was even stranger…



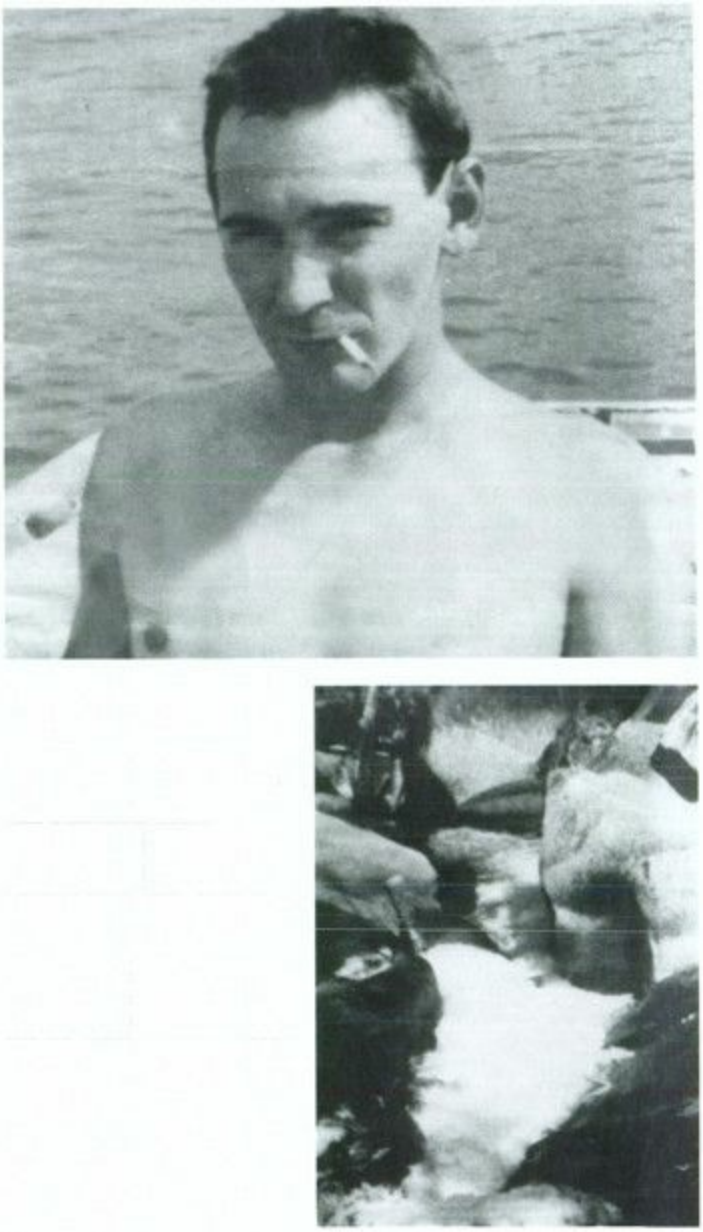
MANSION OF MANY GHOSTS Parapsychologists consider the Monte Cristo homestead in Junee, NSW (above opposite), to be Australia's most haunted house. For decades witnesses have been reporting visible entities, inexplicable sounds and a broad range of paranormal phenomena ranging from solid 'walls of light' to the mysterious deaths of domestic birds and animals. The spirits of Christopher and Elizabeth Crawley (above), who built the grand mansion in 1884, are still reportedly seen throughout the premises, particularly in the upstairs hallway (right), the boxroom and the former chapel.

Sightings have also been reported in the carriage shed (above). Note the glowing female figure, with period hat, at right of carriage. ***Photographs courtesy Reg and Olive Ryan, Monte Cristo.***

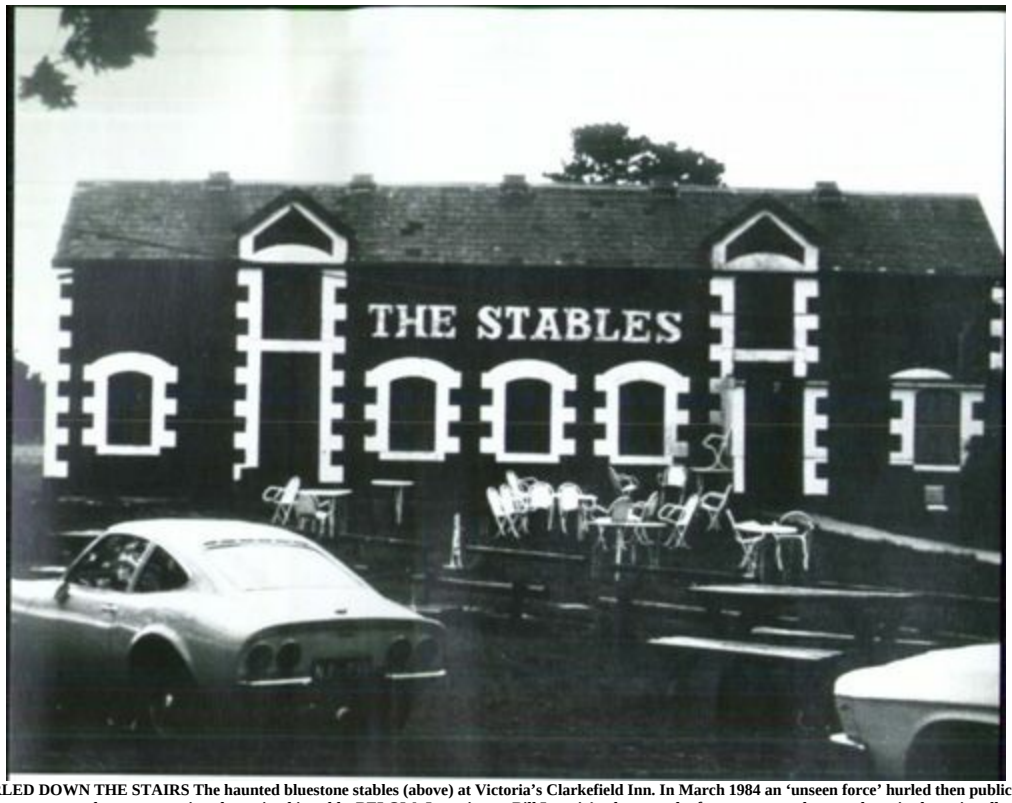
DEAD HUSBAND APPEARS IN PHOTO When Mrs Emmy Barnes [left], of Adelaide, posed for a picture at her second wedding, she was unaware of the startling silhouette in the mirror on the wall. It wasn't until the prints were developed that she saw it.



'TOO CLOSE FOR COINCIDENCE' Emmy and her friends and family immediately recognised the distinctive features of her deceased first husband, Jimmy (left). Emmy then recalled that before Jimmy died he had urged her to remarry, promising that he would be a benign presence at the wedding.

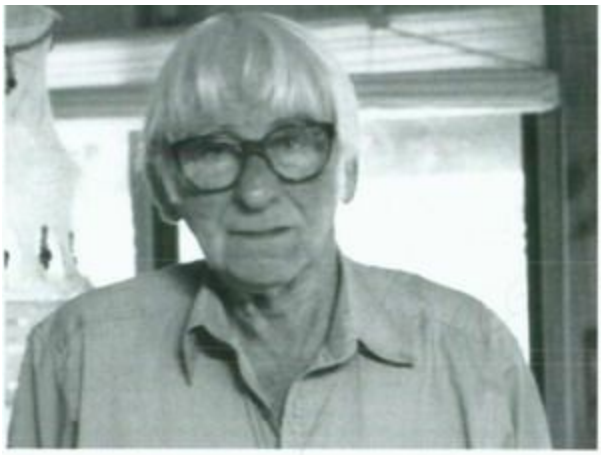


FACE IN A 'HAUNTED POOL' Two hours before he drowned at The Boulders, a cascading stream near Babinda, Queensland, Patrick McGann's girlfriend photographed him. That night police took a photograph of the notorious death-spot using infra-red film. Patrick's father said: 'When it was developed the sergeant took me quietly aside and showed it to me. Patrick's face could clearly be seen in the water, even down to the cigarette in his mouth. A priest told me, "There's a lot of things in life we'll never understand. This is one of them.'" ***Pool photograph by Babinda police***



HURLED DOWN THE STAIRS The haunted bluestone stables (above) at Victoria's Clarkefield Inn. In March 1984 an 'unseen force' hurled then publican Frank Nelson down steep stairs, shattering his ankle. BELOW: Investigator Bill Lawrie's photograph of a transparent human shape in the stairwell.

DID 'GHOST' CAUSE PILEUP? Journalist John Westbury and boilermaker Bill Featherstone (above) were among an army of motorists who reported seeing a 'foggy figure' floating above Victoria's Mornington-Frankston freeway just before a 19-car pileup.



PLEADING PHANTOM Engineer Ted Leopold (right) woke, with his wife Elsie, to see a ‘message-bearing’ ghost hovering in the room.

SWIRLING APPARITION Estate agent John Effer photographed a floating figure (right) in a Queensland house. He used a Canon AEI reflex camera which had to be advanced after firing, making double exposures impossible.

SEANCE PREDICTIONS PROVED EERILY ACCURATE On the massive stage of Melbourne's haunted Princess Theatre, the TEN Network filmed a seance. During the proceedings an 'entity' made predictions via the shifting wineglass - prophecies that came tragically true three days later. From left, three seance participants: actress Kerry Armstrong; author John Pinkney; medium Kerry Kulkens.

SPECTRES ON STAGE On 3 March 1888 baritone Federici (Frederick Baker) suffered a fatal heart attack while descending through a trapdoor into the fires of a 'Hell' beneath Melbourne's Princess Theatre stage. In the 117 years since that night, legions of visitors, performers and stagehands have described bizarre brushes with the singer's unsleeping ghost. ***Illustration courtesy Bettina Guthridge***

CLOCK SHOCK On the day Arthur Jackson's funeral was held, the immense clock he'd built above Brisbane's city hall failed to chime for the first time in 53 years.

Phantom ‘Saved’ Theatre

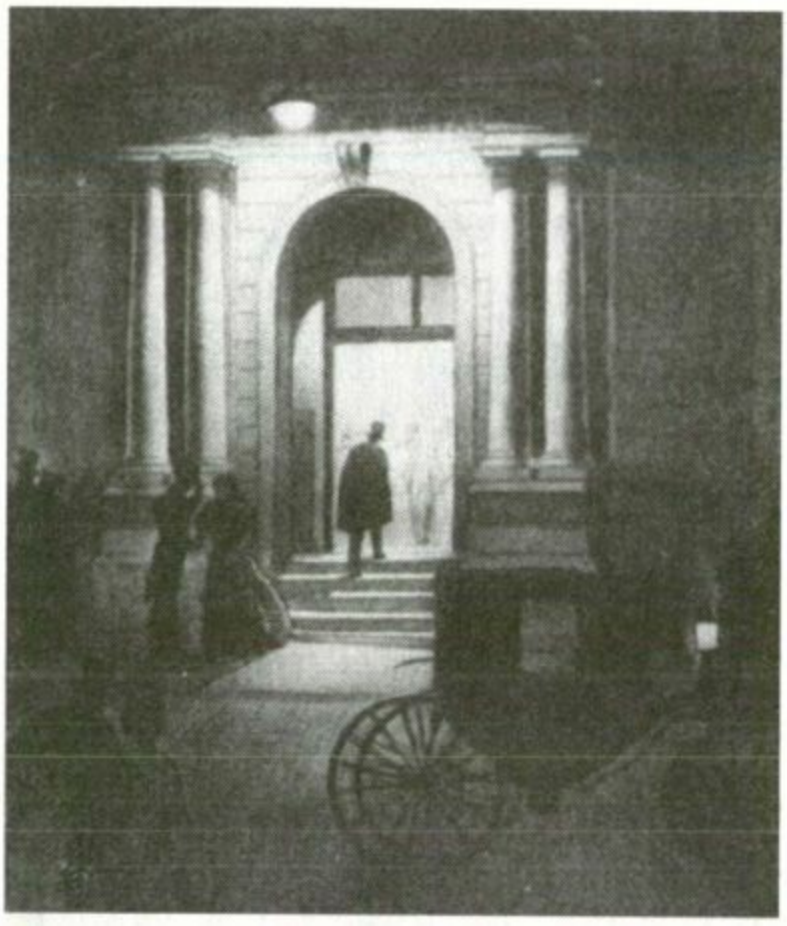
On 18 June 1984 a fierce fire swept through the ornate Theatre Royal, Hobart. The old building was rescued from ruin when a fire curtain astonishingly dropped of its own accord across the stage, preventing flames from spreading beyond the first six rows of seats. The *Hobart Mercury* commented: ‘The fact that the curtain operated on its own has not been fully explained…(but) a small fuse probably burned through and released it.’

There was an immediate chorus of dissent. Readers (some serious, some tongue-in-cheek) insisted that the miraculous deliverance must surely have been the work of ‘Fred’, the spirit which had haunted the venerable playhouse for generations. Pauline Buckley, the Royal’s manager at the time, backed the protesters. ‘Fred - not a fuse - can take credit for halting the fire,’ she said. ‘He loves his theatre - and I’m sure he was responsible for saving it.’

The Royal, built in 1834, is Australia’s oldest theatre. Throughout its 171 years hundreds of performers, patrons and stagehands have reported such phenomena as:

- Stumbling footsteps and loud crashes in the darkened stalls
- A voice, seemingly alcohol-slurred, which calls to individuals by name
- Gusts of freezing wind blowing across the stage
- Jolting sensations, resembling electric shocks, which travel swiftly across the skin
- A floating human figure which lingers in the empty aisles
- Seats in the auditorium inexplicably banging up and down

Among performers who have heard or seen the ghost are actress Jacki Weaver and TV and radio performer John- Michael Howson. In an interview with Ray Martin on Channel 9 John said, ‘It happened when I was playing in a Christmas pantomime. I was standing in the wings waiting to go on when I heard a voice loudly whispering, *“John- Michael!”* I didn’t look around because I had to concentrate on my entry-cue. The voice was persistent. It called my name three more times.



An early glimpse of Hobart's Theatre Royal. ***Courtesy Theatre Royal***

'When I came off stage I was still annoyed and said, "Whoever was whispering, please don't do it again." They all just looked at each other. Then someone said, "You've heard it too. That was our ghost."'

Jacki Weaver recalled, After a show I realised I'd left some personal belongings on stage. I went back but the theatre was all locked up - so I asked if it could be opened for me. I walked onto the stage - and then was quite startled to see that a *ghostly someone* was sitting in the dress circle. It had an unmistakably human shape - but I sensed quite strongly that it wasn't human.'

The director Nigel Triffett described a similar experience - recalling that he had seen a 'bright white shape' sitting in the third row from the back of the empty theatre.

John Unicomb, a former manager, told me, 'I've never seen the phantom myself, but people are constantly talking about it. Once, when we put on *Bandwagon,* an actor strolled onto the stage before a rehearsal and stood looking down into the shadowy auditorium. He heard footsteps approaching

him and called out, “Who’s there?”

‘The footsteps immediately stopped - and when he switched on the lights there was nobody anywhere. No intruder would have had time to get away without being seen.’

Some investigators believe the Royal might be haunted by the spectre of a stage mechanist who was killed in a drunken brawl in the tavern which once occupied the building’s brooding basement. Others think it equally possible that the presence is the spirit of a whaler who, records show, was fatally knifed by a prostitute.

Operations manager Tim Munro assured the *Sunday Tasmanian* (17 September 2000) that there was truth in the old saying a ghost can make the flesh prickle. He recalled that at 3 am in 1997 he went to the gallery to angle lights toward the stage. Despite the late hour he felt comfortable to be alone in the theatre. But then - ‘Suddenly, from nowhere, I got this incredible chill inside,’ he said. ‘It was like an energy I have no words for - like a cold electric shock - went through me.

‘I knew the ghost was near.’

Bird Show Bedlam - in a Haunted Hall

The Theatre Royal is not the only Tasmanian playhouse in which a freezing wind reportedly blusters across the stage. The Burnie Civic Centre, built on the site of an old Chinese market garden, has been similarly troubled.

Possibly the most alarming manifestation occurred during preparations for a bird show, The centre's manager Roger Morrison told me, 'My wife Bev and I were locking up for the night - and the birds were sitting peacefully on their perches. Suddenly everything went crazy, with the birds panicking and squawking and flying against the bars of their cages. Then we saw why. The big weighted velvet curtains were billowing out from the stage, as if a gale- force wind was blowing them.

'Of course we assumed someone was playing a joke on us - and we went on-stage to test the curtains for ourselves. They were so heavily leaded we could barely lift them, let alone send them flying. The incident not only frightened the birds, it terrified us. We haven't a clue what's haunting us here - but I've lost count of the number of visitors and staff who've heard or felt it.'

The phantom sometimes impinges on multiple witnesses. Six members of Burnie's musical society were in a dressing room preparing to head home, when they heard someone playing the grand piano in the concert hall. When they investigated the hall was in darkness. At the moment one of the group switched on the lights the playing abruptly stopped. The piano stool was empty.

'The phenomenon creates constant difficulties,' Roger Morrison said. 'Sometimes we find stove hotplates have been switched on in the locked kitchen overnight. Someone clumps through empty rooms and opens and closes doors when nobody's there. And for years no technician has been able to get any of our three clocks to tell the time. They just keep stopping. We even tried buying new clocks - but before long they were malfunctioning too.'

Poltergeist ‘Trapped on Tape’

Reverend John Legg, a retired clergyman, was so intrigued by accounts of apparitions and other unnerving manifestations within the Civic Centre that he spent a year conducting detailed interviews with 30 witnesses, recording their experiences in a journal. He then tried to videotape the ghost - or ghosts - at work.

The first half-dozen attempts drew blanks. But when he taped a rehearsal by students of the Reflexions Dance Studio something extraordinary happened: while the dancers are preoccupied with their routine the tape shows, in closeup, the big weighted curtains being lifted about 60 centimetres into the air. Boxes, which previously had been hidden, are clearly visible as the curtain rises.

‘Some doubters put the movement down to the air conditioning,’ Rev. Legg said. ‘I had no idea it could create such powerful draughts.’

Six Cases of Stagefright

- *Stirling Community Theatre, near Adelaide* Reputedly haunted by the spirit of a town councillor who had an affair with a colleague's wife when the building was a town hall in the late 19th century. The infuriated husband beat his rival senseless, then crammed him into a safe, where he suffocated.
- *Her Majesty's Theatre Brisbane* Demolished in 1983, but the bar which replaced part of the theatre is still occasionally troubled by the echoes of a murder committed in 1900. An actor killed a colleague in a dressing room and hid his body in the ceiling. Long after the corpse had been removed the long-dead victim's ghost continued to appear in the dress circle. Singer Jon English saw the apparition after a performance of *Jesus Christ, Superstar.* 'It was a transparent figure that walked slowly from one side of the dress circle to the other,' English said.

One of the theatre's oddest aspects was a staircase which led nowhere. Not on the original building plans, it started near the canteen and ended against a solid wall. The sound of footsteps, seemingly ascending the stairs, often echoed through the theatre. Even more bizarre were the phantom pillars. In the 1930s, when the interior was remodelled, the upper circle was removed and its supporting columns taken out. But for years afterward, patrons complained that they had been given bad seats. Pillars had obstructed their view.

- *Melbourne Town Hall* Several musicians have reported that while they were playing the organ on the town hall stage, a transparent male figure would appear and fiddle with the keys. In 1982 organist Thomas Hayward spoke publicly about his encounter with the entity - saying that while he was recording Percy Grainger's *Colonial Song* it walked several times around the organ. He also noticed that stops were changing by themselves. Angry, he shouted, 'Go away and let me finish!' The intruder vanished.
- *Her Majesty's Theatre Ballarat* Built in 1858 and now incorporated into a new Civic Performance Centre the premises are still disturbed by the spirit of a 16-year-old girl in a white evening dress, who appears in a

side-box in the dress circle. The ghost - which is also associated with such unsettling phenomena as whisperings, banging seats and lights switching on and off - has a sad provenance. In 1874 a family of musicians gave a performance in the Mechanics Institute Hall, which backed onto Her Majesty's. The girl played the piano. Next day the Ballarat *Courier* published a scathing review of her performance. She fell ill and died.

- *Princess Theatre Launceston* Theorists believe that when architect Albert Liddy suicided in the early 20th century his spirit lingered in the theatre he had lovingly designed. The record of incidents includes high-pitched whistlings, shuffling footsteps, painful drops in temperature and the commonly reported phenomenon of a piano playing with no one at the keys.
- *World Theatre Charters Towers* Two boisterous entities, which have jostled employees and, many years ago, the manager's small son, are believed still to inhabit this theatre, currently a cinema, in the 135-year-old town. Many witnesses have claimed the presences appear as bright, floating lights. One is thought to be the spirit of an usher who died in the building during World War II.

The Tragic Haunting of June Bronhill

By the time she turned 23 the brilliant Australian soprano Mary Gough had already won the prestigious Sun Aria and Mobil Quest awards and was being urged to try her luck in London. The people of her birthplace, Broken Hill, subscribed to an appeal to make the trip possible. In gratitude - and following a tradition established by Nellie Melba and Florence Austral - the young singer condensed the name of her hometown into a new surname: Bronhill. When she died many years later, on 25 January 2005, the name June Bronhill was celebrated around the world.

June's studies in Britain with tenor Dino Borgioli quickly led to an engagement with the Sadlers Wells opera company where she sang in such productions as *Die Fledermaus, Rigoletto* and *Don Pasquale* - eventually achieving her first international success when she performed the leading role in *The Merry Widow.*

June Bronhill was leading a fulfilling and happy life - until the day she attended a rehearsal in one of London's most famous theatres. During the morning an invisible hand began intermittently to tap her on the shoulder and continued at intervals through the day. Fellow performers assured her that the intrusions were harmless - saying it was probably the newly resident ghost introducing itself. June tried to concentrate on the music and to ignore the tappings.

Not until several weeks later did she become convinced that the presence had been trying to *warn* her about an imminent nightmare of ill-luck and death - a cascade of dark events that would devastate the theatre company with which she worked.

The eminent soprano's brush with the unknown began at the Theatre Royal in London's Drury Lane. In her autobiography *The Merry Bronhill* she describes the grim pattern that unfolded:

> …*We were rehearsing Ivor Novello's musical* The Dancing Years, *and I used to wrap myself in big sweaters to keep warm…One day I suddenly felt the tap on my shoulder, I turned around but nobody was there. A while later, there was the tap again, and I accused the other cast members of playing a joke on me. But they replied that it was probably the ghost of the composer Ivor Novello, who had died in 1951…The phantom repeatedly walked in the dress circle area where we were*

rehearsing.

The Dancing Years toured Britain so successfully that it was booked for the West End. And it was then that the mishaps began.

Two awful things happened…There was a heatwave followed by a rail strike, and business slumped. That was only the beginning, however. I was taken to hospital with a tumour on my pituitary gland…While I was away, several cast members went for a drive. They were actually outside Ivor Novello's house, Redroofs in Reading, when a car came around the corner on the wrong side of the road and ran into them head-on.

Three of the group, including the leading man Enrico Giacomini, were killed, and the others were badly injured. I heard about this when I was in hospital. I felt certain, then, that it was Ivor who had tapped me on the shoulder to tell me something bad was going to happen with the show - and that we should stop doing it, because it was never meant to be.

Enrico's understudy took over, but everyone felt now the show had the kiss of death. Then another dreadful thing…The producer had told us his wife was pregnant and they were both very excited.

During our short London season she had twins. But one was still-born and the other was mongoloid.

Hostile Ghosts

The Malign Message in the Mirror

Throughout 1984 a mischievous entity engineered an unprecedented turnover of tenants in a Victorian seaside house. The ghost climaxed its series of sinister tricks by writing a word on the glass of a bathroom mirror: a cryptic message which the property's alarmed occupants found almost impossible to remove. Australia's long history of hauntings is crowded with such incidents, in which unfriendly intelligences have tried to drive 'intruders' from the premises…

THE PRETTY WEATHERBOARD BUNGALOW STOOD in a treed suburban street of Geelong, Victoria. When the new tenants, Tony and Doris Vouk, signed the rental agreement they nothing of the property's recent history. But they quickly learned. Before 24 hours had elapsed the Vouks found themselves targeted by repeated 'attacks from nowhere'.

Doris recalled, At first we imagined someone was playing jokes on us. But then we began experiencing things for which there seemed no sensible explanation. One afternoon for example a few friends were with us in the master bedroom when a big box of shoes suddenly flew from the top of the wardrobe. After we'd ducked this hail of footwear we had a good search for whatever had sent the shoes flying. But there was nothing. The shoes seemed to have been pushed by something invisible.'

Considerably more alarming was the man in the bathroom mirror. First to encounter it was the Vouks' friend Ray Jungbauer, a former Australian weightlifting champion. 'I'm not into haunted houses, but I do know what I saw - and it was strange,' Ray said. 'When I entered the bathroom I was immediately aware of a silhouette-like human figure glittering in the glass of the mirror. It looked like a photographic negative. I just stood there, unable to move. Then the thing burst out of the glass and walked straight past me. I freaked out and bolted to the kitchen.'

The friends soon realised that the ghost wanted them gone. 'It did everything it could to make life tough for us,' Doris said. 'Our phone calls were repeatedly cut off and at night the lights were always going off and on.

'But the worst aspect was the bathroom. We'd constantly discover shaving cream spread around, and scattered powder with tiny fingerprints in it. One day we found the word "GET" written on the mirror. It looked as though someone had breathed on the glass then traced the letters with a figure. It proved almost impossible to remove the word - and that was the incident that drove us out, after only 12 days in the place.'

Hauntings of this kind are commonly believed to result from blind rage, expressed by people unaware that they have died. According to the theory proposed by some parapsychologists, a spirit that 'wakes' after death, in what it believes is still its own home, may react violently against newcomers - whom it understandably sees as unwelcome interlopers. Sometimes a so-called 'rescue seance' can solve this problem - removing the purported

phantom from the premises by helping it progress to the next stage of existence.

Evicted, by a ‘Drowned Ghost’

I have received many letters over the years from people forced, by paranormal events, to flee their houses. A memorable report came from J. Millichamp of Darlinghurst, New South Wales:

Several years ago a group of us pooled our money to rent an old double-storeyed house. We were all thrilled to have found the place, with its big rooms and beautiful garden. But our enthusiasm waned somewhat when odd things began to happen.

The day after we moved in we noticed a horrible dead smell near a wall at the foot of a staircase. A friend went into an adjoining room and found the stench there also. At first we concluded that a mouse or possum must have died in the hollow wall. But after a few hours the smell suddenly vanished and never returned. Thinking about it later we wondered if the stench had somehow been sent there to greet us.

The following night we all went to a film. We returned to find every window and door wide open. All the showers and taps were running, the gas-jets on the stove were full on and the oven door was ajar. Nothing had been stolen.

From that time on, things got steadily worse. One night, from bed, I heard Liz, one of my friends, arrive home. After her footsteps had passed my door I heard following footsteps, along with two women’s voices, laughing. I assumed Liz had brought friends home with her. But when I broached the subject next morning she said she’d been alone.

That day, standing on the stairs, I felt someone brush past me, and glimpsed a figure from the corner of my eye. At that moment the temperature dropped, so sharply that I began to shiver violently.

The end came when I went to the rather quaint old bathroom for a shower. In the tub I saw what looked like the outline of a man’s body. *I ran into the garden screaming and into the arms of the woman next door. When I told her what I’d seen she slowly shook her head. Then she informed me that a few years previously a man had slipped in the bath, hit his head and died. I decided I’d had enough, and moved out that very day.*

The Vandalistic Visitor

A Melbourne correspondent, Terri Cahill, recalled a strangely congenial encounter with a phantom. It was what she discovered next morning that alarmed her:

> *…One night I put my eight-week-old daughter down to sleep in her coaster-wheeled bassinet. At about 3 am I woke for some reason and looked over at the bassinet which stood on my side of the bed. In the light from outside I could see the dark shape of a man - more like a shadow than a figure - looking down at my little girl.*
>
> *You'd think that my protective motherly instincts would have prompted me to wake my husband - but astonishingly I felt peaceful and unafraid. After a few minutes spent staring at the figure I simply lay back and went to sleep again. When we woke next morning I told my husband what had happened, then got up to check on my daughter.*
>
> *To my complete amazement I found that a wheel had been removed from the bassinet and was lying on the floor about 18 inches from the bed. To remove that wheel you'd have had to lift the entire bassinet and move the six-inch rod which fitted into the legs. I couldn't imagine how this peculiar operation had been performed without waking us - or why it had been performed at all. This strange meeting in the small hours of the morning, and its aftermath, have remained sharp in my memory ever since. I know it was a ghost I saw - but I've never been able to decide whether its visit was friendly (as it first seemed) or contained an element of threat.*

Foggy Intruder's 'Stinging Slaps'

During the 1990s an entire family in Perth Tasmania reported that they had endured attacks by a violent interloper seemingly shrouded in white fog. One of the victims, Michelle Wilkins, wrote to me describing the ordeal:

My mother came to breakfast one morning looking pale and upset. At first she refused to tell us what was wrong - but in the end she revealed that she'd experienced something terrible overnight. She'd woken up feeling bitterly cold. Just as she was getting up to find an extra blanket she saw a man, surrounded by white fog, standing in a corner of the bedroom.

'She tried to scream, but her vocal cords seemed to be frozen. As she stood there staring she realised that only half of the man was visible. Then he started fading slowly away - and the temperature returned to normal.

'This prompted my 15-year-old brother to admit he'd seen the ghost too. He said it was a white gleaming figure sitting on the end of his bed. He tried to leap out, with the idea of punching what he half-believed was a burglar, but he found he was totally paralysed. He was forced to lie there, unable to move his eyes from it. When it changed its angle slightly he was horrified to see that it had no facial features.

'A few days later the apparition began to visit my room. I saw nothing at first, but I'd be woken by something invisible jumping on my bed. Then I'd feel a series of stinging slaps on my cheeks. One night I opened my eyes to find a ball of bright light floating in my room. As I lay there trying to work out what it could be, my blankets were ripped off and dumped on the floor.

'We were all extremely frightened - but because we knew nothing about hauntings or exorcisms at that time, we had no idea of how to get rid of the ghost. Fortunately, however, it seemed gradually to lose interest in us, and the visits tapered off.

Two weeks later a neighbour told us something we hadn't known about our house. An elderly man had died there and his grieving wife had kept the body for a week before telling anyone. The room in which the dead man had lain later became my bedroom.

Couple Dumped a Haunted Bed

An antique brass bed, plagued by poltergeist activity, became a talking-point among South Australians during the 1980s. After receiving a tipoff about the phenomenon I spoke to the bed's former owner Mrs Wendy Rohrlach of Whyalla. She told me that recurring nightmares and visits from a 'cone-shaped' apparition had forced her to sell.

Several weeks after she disposed of the bed, Wendy met the previous owners in the street and tentatively enquired whether they had ever noticed anything unusual. After some hesitation the couple disclosed that they too had seen the cone-shaped figure and had been troubled by mattress-tugging, rattling and deeply unpleasant nightmares.

Wendy had given little thought to the supernatural before she bought the bed from an antique dealer in 1981. The first hints that something was wrong came when, on several occasions, she found the bedcovers ruffled, drawers opened, blinds pulled down and books moved. At first I thought our two-year-old, Prue, was doing it,' she said. 'Gradually, however, I began to wonder. I started taking notes of how I'd left the bedroom. And I shut the door to stop Prue getting in.

'But things were still being disturbed. One day I left a book facedown on the bed. When I returned the book was closed and a corner was turned down. I never turn down corners on pages. During the eight months we owned the bed I had constant nightmares. They only stopped when we got rid of it. Our little daughter and the family cat both seemed aware there was something wrong in the vicinity of that bed. Prue would often run from the room, crying and pointing…and the cat several times bolted in terror.

'One night I was wakened by a humming noise. When I looked I saw a white figure, shaped like a cone, just standing there. It was snowy, like an old black-and-white film.'

For weeks the humming, the nightmares and visits from the apparition continued. On one occasion Wendy was jolted awake by a dream that her daughter was in danger. 'I rushed into her room and found her asleep in her cot with a lot of little pins sprinkled over the mattress. The only pins I had in the house were in my sewing basket which I kept high in a linen cupboard. I looked - and those pins were undisturbed.'

Several nights later the couple were wakened by particularly violent

tuggings at the mattress. They decided at last to rid themselves of the bed. But even then, the disturbances continued. When Wendy rang a furniture dealer she had trouble making him understand she was talking about a brass bed - and ended by shouting those two words into the phone.

Immediately there was an enormous crash from the bedroom. The bed had collapsed.

THIS IS NOT THE ONLY 'possessed bed' report that I have received. In 1990 a particularly terrifying case (for which exorcism was the recommended solution) was described to me by J. Green of Greystones, New South Wales:

> *…The bed belongs to a friend of mine and I wish she'd have the courage to get rid of it. Her husband bought it from a deceased estate, as part of a suite.*
>
> *The furniture was moved in during a major heatwave. Everyone was astonished that the room temperature immediately plunged to what seemed like Arctic levels. Several weeks after the furniture came into the house, the family learned that the suite's previous owner had taken her own life while lying on the bed.*
>
> *The bedroom is so cold that the door has to be kept permanently closed. On the rare occasions the door is open the family pets flinch away, fur on end, as they pass the room.*
>
> *The problem is that my friend is frightened to throw the suite out. Whenever anyone talks about ghosts and getting rid of the bedroom setting the whole house goes chilly. She then walks to the bedroom door and says, "I'm sorry" - whereupon everything warms up again. Since her husband died and her children have left home my friend has ceased to sleep in that room. But she has to store clothes in the cupboards - and when she goes in there she becomes badly upset.*
>
> *The haunting is affecting my friend's health. None of this is fantasy. Everyone who goes to her house knows and fears that room.*

SIMILARLY BIZARRE EVENTS, centring on a secondhand mattress, were described to me by Mrs A. Kelly of Holland Park, Queensland:

> *My husband and I had been married for only a few weeks and couldn't afford anything new. So we did the next-best thing and went to an auction where we bought some old furniture, in good condition, and a double innerspring mattress which seemed to be as-new.*

There was no trouble for several weeks; then one night my husband was woken by a terrible distant sobbing and screaming. Thinking it was me, having a nightmare, he shook me awake. But the horrible sound continued. It was definitely a woman's voice and we could swear it was coming from inside the mattress, as if a radio or tape-player was hidden in there.

Next morning we almost managed to talk each other into believing we'd imagined it. But that night the crying woke us again. It frightened us out of our wits, to such an extent that we dragged the mattress outside, then slept on the divan.

I rang the charity that had held the auction, to discover where my job-lot of furniture and mattress had originated. They were from a deceased estate. I was never able to find out what the owner died of. However I had to conclude she was in some kind of terrible distress. But my husband wasn't interested in theories. He doused the mattress in kerosene and burned it.

In the annals of paranormal research there are numerous examples of emotions 'imprinting' themselves upon inanimate objects. A fascinating manifestation of the syndrome was investigated in the 1970s by an ESP study group in Oslo. Patients at a large hospital complained that whenever they sat in a certain chair in the TV viewing room they experienced extreme discomfort and sometimes felt painfully cold.

Knowing that this had been the chair favoured by a woman recently deceased the investigators began by checking the possibility that the patients' symptoms were psychosomatic. But then they tried sitting in the chair themselves. All experienced sharp pains in the back and chest - and three reported that the temperature* dropped so sharply it was like sitting on ice. A lingering manifestation of the woman who had died? Conceivably, because the investigators could find no physical explanation. (*An often-proposed theory about the deep chills experienced in some hauntings is that the entity is drawing energy, in the form of warmth, from the atmosphere.)

Cricketers Cringe from the Woman-in-the-Well

On 21 June 2005, members of Australia's cricket team were startled by the purported 'rumblings' of a hostile phantom, believed to emerge from an ancient well beneath their rooms. Their reaction mirrored that of three West Indies cricketers who had fled the premises in 2002.

According to the *Independent* and the *Guardian* the Australians encountered the turbulent entity while staying at Durham's Lumley Castle Hotel. All-rounder Shane Watson was so disturbed by events that he moved to colleague Brett Lee's room, the papers said.

The *Independent* reported, 'Belinda Dennett, Australia's media officer, also had a night she will never forget. "My phone went off in the middle of the night and I looked out of the window," she said. "I knew I had closed the blinds, but they were open and I saw a procession of brilliantly white people walking past. It was amazing, very scary. Then I went to bed and the blind went up, and there was someone looking in through the window. I know I wasn't dreaming because I wrote down a message from my phone and the time."'

Chief among the beings believed to haunt the castle is the ghost of Lord Lumley's wife, who was murdered and thrown down a well. Her spirit is said to rise via the well at night, causing rumblings in darkened rooms.

Messages from the Dead

Saved - By an Unearthly Voice

Three months after her father's funeral, a young woman, driving on a rural Queensland road, heard him scream a warning from the back seat. Reflexively she slammed on the brakes, thus sparing herself from almost certain death at a crossroads ahead. Like many Australians - and other witnesses worldwide - she believes her life was saved by a 'psychic shout': a warning of imminent danger thought by some to emanate from beyond the grave…

WHEN SHE HEARD THE ‘UNMISTAKABLE VOICE’ of her dead father bellowing at her from the back of the car, Barb Scott had no time to think logically. Instinct took over, as she stamped on the brakes of the family sedan and swung it to the gravelled edge of the Queensland country road on which she had been travelling.

‘It was lucky I did,’ she subsequently told me. ‘A couple of seconds after I stopped, another car - travelling at insane speed - hurtled across the intersection I’d been entering. It would certainly have killed me if I hadn’t stopped. Finding it hard to breathe I adjusted the mirror to see who (impossibly, I knew) could really have been sitting in the back. Nobody was there - not visibly anyway - but the incident convinced me that my dad was still close by and looking after me.’

Barb’s experience, three months after her father died of a heart attack, was the first of two apparently paranormal contacts. ‘Several days after the car episode I dreamed I visited Dad’s house to ensure everything was being looked after. I saw him standing in a doorway, smiling. The shock was so intense that - in my dream - I fainted. As I struggled from sleep, I remembered Dad taking my right hand, to help me up. By this time I was wide awake - and aware of a strange numb feeling in my hand.

‘Although it had been under the blankets it was icy cold - and stayed that way for several minutes. That dream (if it was a dream) left me with the conviction that my father had actually reached out and touched me. I’ve sensed ever since that he is always nearby.’

This account is far from being unique. Over the years I have spoken or corresponded with scores of sincere and intelligent people who say they have been forced to the conclusion that a dead relative or friend somehow intruded, benignly, into their lives. A particularly intriguing reminiscence was offered to me by Darrel Pick, who believed his mother returned from the dead to prevent him from becoming a paraplegic:

> *At the time I was working as a security guard in a North Adelaide factory. One night I slipped and fell down a steel staircase. I tried to tough out my injuries and keep going - but after several weeks of agonising back pain I collapsed and was taken to North Adelaide Hospital. By that time I was completely numb down the right side - and after CAT scans and other investigations the surgeon warned that I*

might end up paralysed.

It was then that thoughts of my dead mother began pouring into my mind. I started having dreams in which she said she could heal me if I kept an open mind.

On the night before my operation a brilliant white light filled the hospital ward. I felt a warm tingling from head to toe and powerfully sensed my mother's presence in the room.

Next day the doctors went to work on a disc at the base of my spine. It had fragmented, dragging the spinal cord and nervous system with it. After the operation the surgeon told me I'd been a sneeze away from having no bodily functions below the waist. He said he'd never seen anything heal so swiftly or perfectly. When I thanked him he refused credit, saying, 'I don't believe it was me. Something else was at work. Someone up there likes you.'

The Teenage Boy and

the Shout from Nowhere

The incident, which would linger in Queenslander Barry Johnson's memory, occurred when he was 16 years old:

> *I was cycling home from a friend's place at about 9.30 pm when I heard a strangely familiar male voice, so loud it almost knocked me off my bike. It said, 'GO BY COOPER'S YARD!' When I got over the shock I realised that the words hadn't come from anywhere around me, but from inside my head.*
>
> *I felt I knew the person who'd yelled, but was unable to place him. However, I couldn't resist heading for Cooper's Yard, which was on a different route from the one I normally took home. The place was little more than an empty lot, owned by an old bloke who'd sold chopped wood to my grandfather. Before he died I'd often helped Grandpa load Mr Cooper's logs into the family ute.*
>
> *When I reached Cooper's Yard I saw it no longer existed. A house had been built on the site. Increasingly sure I'd imagined the voice, I kept cycling home. It was drizzling when I passed through the shopping centre. I was skirting past a half-circle of people gathered by the kerb when I saw they were looking down at a woman, lying unconscious. As with the voice I'd heard earlier, she seemed oddly familiar. Then I realised with horror it was my mother. Nobody had called an ambulance - everyone imagined someone else had rung - so I rushed off to do it myself.*
>
> *My mother had lost a great deal of blood - and a doctor at the hospital later told me she'd have died if she had lain on that road much longer. By this time I'd realised who had shouted the command at me. It was my grandfather, who died when I was 12. By sending me past Cooper's Yard he'd ensured that I would save my mother's life.*

In my experience, people who report an event of this kind tend to react acceptingly. Because of the circumstances surrounding the case they find it hard to doubt that the contact with what seems to be a dead relative has

actually occurred, or that it has produced a benign result. Any sceptic who resorts to circuitous logic to dismiss the incident is likely to receive a response along the lines, ‘I was there - you weren’t.’

Another example of a lifesaving intervention was offered to me by a South Australian correspondent, Stephen Bax of Leigh Creek:

> *Many years ago some friends and I were travelling by car from Katherine to Darwin. It was the Christmas season and I’d been doing most of the driving. Finally Val, a member of our group, took a spell at the wheel while I rested in the back seat.*

I was nodding off when I was jolted awake by my father’s voice, loudly calling my name. A part of my mind knew this was impossible, because Dad had died five years before. But another part prompted me to look ahead - just in time to see another car coming straight toward us. I could see the driver’s face - and he seemed to be frozen with fear. Apparently my mate had dropped off to sleep at the wheel. I yelled at him, ‘Val! Watch out!’

He woke up just in time, swerved and barely missed the oncoming car. My other friends didn’t even stir through all this - but I knew that my dead father had saved their lives as well as mine.

A Heart Attack Warning in the Night

A disembodied ‘someone’ (he was never sure who) roused a grandfather from sleep and ordered him to see his doctor immediately. ‘If that voice hadn’t whispered in my ear - and kept on whispering till I obeyed it - I’d have died,’ Stefan Dobrowny of Berala, New South Wales, told me.

While Stefan’s wife and daughter were holidaying in Austria with his grandchildren, he was sleeping in the house alone. ‘Soon after 5 am I was woken by someone whispering gently near my right ear,’ he recalled. It said, in Ukrainian, *‘Stefan - wake up and hurry to hospital!’* I lifted my head and looked around the room, but it was empty. Then, when I lay down again, the ghostly voice returned, much stronger this time, saying, ‘*Wake up and hurry!’* - again in my native tongue.

I decided I’d better do what it said. I dressed, then hurried out to catch the early train from Berala to Lidcombe where my doctor practised. Just as I arrived at his surgery I collapsed unconscious. I woke in the intensive care unit of Auburn District Hospital where it was found that I’d suffered a heart attack. I was transferred to Concord Hospital and remained there for six weeks. I recovered, thanks to the staff’s excellent care, but I always knew that I might have perished in my bedroom, had it not been for that voice. I’ve often wondered whether the warning came because it was not my allotted time to die.’

Many Australian survivors of NDEs (near-death experiences) have asked a similar question:

Are we predestined to perform certain tasks on earth? And does some power forbid us to die before our work is done?

Go Back - It Isn’t Time!

John Grey of Darwin believed the mystery merited serious debate. At a point in my life when I least expected it, I was struck by an unexplained illness,’ he told me. ‘The condition caused excruciating pain and confined me to bed. I couldn’t walk and felt sicker than I’d ever been before. The crisis point came one night when I had the distinct feeling that I was floating out of my body. I could see myself lying on the bed and struggled to drag myself back down to it. But what felt like a powerful magnetic force kept pulling me upward.

After I’d floated for a while I came to a white gate. As I stepped through, my father - who had been dead for 15 years - appeared on the other side. He pushed me and said, *‘Go back - it isn’t time yet!’* When I kept trying to get in he called another man to help him. To my surprise it was my uncle, my father’s brother. This shocked me because I had no idea he had died. I moved away from the gate and floated for a long time over calm seas and towering cliffs. Then I found myself descending to my body on the bed and I re-entered it.

‘I woke in the morning feeling completely fit, with no hint of the malaise I’d experienced the previous day. Several months later I visited my family, whom I hadn’t seen for many years. My mother told me for the first time about my uncle. He had died in his sleep 10 years earlier. If my death flight was a dream, it was extremely vivid. And it also offered me information about my uncle that I hadn’t possessed before.

All my other dreams fade. But the picture of my father at that white gate remains strongly in my mind and I think about it every day.’

A markedly similar story, in which a dead mother waved her dying son back with the words *‘Not yet’*, appeared in Melbourne’s *Herald Sun* on 7 January 2005. Industrial reporter Wayne Howell interviewed mechanic Gary Culvert who was severely injured when the 13-tonne bus he was working on shifted from its moorings and crashed down on him:

> *After the bus fell…Mr Culvert clinically died four times. Yesterday the 54-year-old wept as he remembered seeing a vision of his recently dead mother. ‘I saw my mum while I was under the bus,’ Mr Culvert said. ‘I really knew something was wrong then. She was standing there looking 20 years younger, wearing a floral dress, but the funny thing was she didn’t have any legs and she was shaking her finger at me saying,* “Not

yet, not yet."'

…Three weeks after the accident a doctor told Gary Culvert he would never walk again. His pelvis had been crushed and most of the bones in his body had been broken. 'I rang my fiancee and cried my heart out and told her, "I have just been told I am going to be a cripple for the rest of my life,"' Mr Culvert said. But the never-say-die fitter and mechanic refused to give up, and worked so hard at his rehabilitation that two weeks ago he amazed doctors by walking without a crutch.

A number of NDE subjects have written to me to describe meetings with parents who died before they were born. One was Jack Paulden of Redcliff Park, Western Australia:

I don't have the slightest trouble believing the resuscitated patients who report having strange experiences while they were clinically dead. It happened to me. In November 1963 I was one of a carload of young sailors returning from leave in Melbourne to our base at Flinders Naval Depot. The car rolled and I was hurled out onto the kerb on my head. My mate died - and the doctors assumed I was gone too, until a nurse noticed my eyelids fluttering.

They rushed me to the theatre and removed part of my left frontal brainlobe. I then lay unconscious for 21 days, and in that time some remarkable things happened. The first was that I met my father, Flying Officer Jack Ahearn who had died while serving with the RAAF in World War II. I had never seen him before, because I was born three months after his death. But there was absolutely no question about who he was. He told me, 'Jack, you mustn't die yet. We're not ready for you. You must go back, get married and have a son of your own. And you'll live long enough to see him marry and father a son of his own.'

The doctors had predicted that if I survived I'd be mentally retarded. But to their surprise I was not only lucid when I woke, but seemed to know what had been going on during my coma. My first words to the nurse were, 'Something terrible has happened to the world. Someone has been killed.' She then told me that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated.

Not all survivors of clinical death report meeting relatives. Some describe encounters with spiritual figures. In 1986 Gordon Walton, a former shire

president of Ballarat, Victoria, experienced a catastrophic accident on his farm. While loading oats he slipped and became entangled in the tractor's grain auger. The shaft smashed his jaw, broke seven ribs and punctured a lung.

'There was no immediate pain,' he told me. 'Just blackness, then the experience of waking up in agony 13 days later. But along with consciousness came an astonishing memory which I knew had not been a dream or hallucination. I remembered dying - and finding myself walking up to a set of dazzling white gates. Everything was so beautiful and I felt ecstatically happy. Then, however, my way was blocked by a bearded man dressed in robes. He said, *'You are not ready. You must go back.'* Immediately I felt myself drifting into my body. But I was so keen to pass through those gates that I tried again, with much the same result. The more I struggled in their direction the more they seemed to recede.

'It was all absolutely real - and I need only shut my eyes to see it again. I know that I travelled to a different world. I'd always believed in the afterlife, but now I know factually that it is there. I'm glad I'm still alive, but I no longer have the slightest fear of death.'

One of his doctors described Gordon Walton as one of Ballarat's most respected residents: 'His injuries were so severe we all expected him to die. His recovery astonished everyone.'

Mrs Ellie Wilson, also of Ballarat, told me a markedly different story about a meeting with deceased relatives in 'another place':

> *I had been extremely ill in hospital for three days. Finally, with my family's permission the doctors decided to chance an operation. I learned later on that I clinically died during the procedure and was 'dead' for 10 minutes before I was brought back.*
>
> *During that time I had a wonderful experience. I found myself in a sunlit garden lane in early autumn. The curious thing was that the leaves were changing colour while I watched. As I stood there, hypnotised by the beauty of it all, my mother and father walked into view. Both of them had died many years before, but they looked just as I remembered them in life. They stood there at the end of the lane, both smiling and gently beckoning to me.*
>
> *I wanted very much to stay in that exquisitely beautiful place with my parents - but something deep within me insisted I should leave. With an enormous effort of will I turned my thoughts back to the life I knew.*

When I recovered consciousness the doctor said it was a miracle I had survived. Now I wonder if it would have been all over for me if I had remained in that autumnal garden.

Can Ghosts Use the Telephone?

In his controversial book *Phone Calls from the Dead* parapsychologist Scott Rogo interviewed several hundred Americans who bizarrely claimed that deceased relatives and friends had telephoned them. Purported phenomena of this kind have been sporadically described in many countries - most notably Thailand, where telephone hauntings are virtually taken for granted (see below). A number of Australians have approached me with similar reports.

- In 1993 John Sierins of Ryde, New South Wales, told me that his mother had spoken by phone to his best friend: 14 hours *after* she died of a stroke. ‘It happened 30 years ago, but I still think about it every day,’ John said. ‘At the time I was living in a flat in Bondi. It was an unhappy period in my life. I’d recently been divorced from my first wife and was only casually acquainted with the woman I’d later marry. My mother, who was living in Riga, Latvia, knew all about my troubles because I wrote to her regularly. At 7.30 am on October 11 my Latvian friend Arvids rang and asked me to go around to his place in Earlwood for breakfast. It was a very unusual invitation as we’d never breakfasted before but I decided it would cheer me up.
- ‘When I arrived Arvids said that a lady had rung at around six o’clock that morning. She had told him, in Latvian, that I would like to see him. That’s why he called me. This was puzzling, because I hadn’t planned to see Arvids at all that day - and I certainly couldn’t think of any woman who would have called him with such a message. But several days later it all fell into place. I received a letter from my father in Riga, saying my mother had died of a stroke. This had happened 14 hours before that mysterious phone call. I could only conclude that my mother, knowing how much her death would grieve me, had telephoned from some unknown place, to ensure I had companionship and support.’
- A Melbourne maths teacher was convinced her dead brother had telephoned her, four months after his funeral. ‘Peter’s death was a terrible shock to our family, as he was only 44,’ Olga Smith told me. ‘One afternoon, four months after he was buried, my husband and I were gardening when the kitchen phone rang. The moment I picked it up there

was a kind of whining accompanied by static, rather like a car radio sounds when you pass a tram. Then the line went clear and I heard what was my brother's distinctive voice saying, *"I miss you, Mopey."* Mopey was the nickname Peter had invented for me (for reasons I forget) when I was a little girl. But he hadn't used it since we were teenagers. I practically screamed into the phone, "Peter - is that you?" but all I got after that was the dialling tone.'

- In September 1986 Shirley O'Brien of Cairns went into shock as the result, as she described it, 'of my dead mother talking to me on the phone'. She recalled, 'My mother had died three months earlier. As was my usual custom I'd phoned my father to see how he was getting along. The phone rang for several seconds, then I heard my mother's familiar voice. Her only words, which are engraved on my memory were, *"Hello? Hello? Bill's not here."* Then she hung up. I stood by the phone, shaking all over. I knew I wasn't hallucinating and my father didn't own an answering machine. I was in shock for the rest of that day. I kept wracking my brain, wondering how my mother could possibly have been able to contact me through a telephone receiver.'
- In *Phone Calls from the Dead,* Scott Rogo writes, 'Poltergeist hauntings prove that non-physical entities are able to exert psycho-kinetic force, causing clocks to chime and ornaments to fly from shelves. If discarnate spirits can perform these tricks there seems no reason why they could not also generate electrical impulses into the telephone system.' The British investigator David Blond agrees, writing, 'Based on the considerable evidence gathered in the United States, Britain and Canada alone there seems a strong likelihood that what may be a form of residual after-life intelligence is sometimes able to communicate with us by electronic means.'

Tears of the Tsunami Dead

On 8 January 2005 the *Weekend Australian* published one of the strangest reports in its history. From Patong, Thailand, correspondent Peter Alford quoted locals as saying that *drowned people had begun making contact by telephone - the day after their lives were snatched away by the gigantic Boxing Day tsunami wave.*

Fearful Thais seek peace with spirits

The restless spirits of the dead are tormenting the living in Thailand, writes Peter Alford in Patong

An extraordinary account of Thailand's telephone-using tsunami ghosts appeared in the Weekend Australian on 8 January 2005.

The BBC's reporter in Phuket, Tony Cheng, filed a similar story about a

domestic phone in Khao Lak. Soon the phenomenon was being chronicled by media worldwide. Peter Alford described a pattern of inexplicable events at the Baan Bang Sak general store, whose owners had become loath to pick up the phone, fearful of what they might find on the other end:

> *'When they answer that phone they hear screaming, they hear a lady crying,' said Am, my Thai interpreter. 'Sometimes the lady calls to them and she knows everybody's name here. They don't want to answer that phone.'*

The hysterical messages began on 27 December, the day after the tsunami struck. The family imagined at first that they were being callously hoaxed. But on 28 December they were offered proof that something seriously abnormal was happening. A young boy took a call from the weeping woman, who identified herself as Jeenda Josakul, a cousin of Sutha, one of the store's owners. Jeenda said her body could be found at a temple in Takua Pa. 'Help me! Help me!' she said. 'I don't want to be burned yet.' She begged her cousin to go to the temple to say Buddhist prayers over her before the mass cremation occurred. At first Sutha was too frightened to comply - but that afternoon she forced herself to attend the temple, where she found Jeenda's body.

However, the calls continued - often with messages from *distressed farangs* (foreigners). The family's members needed the telephone for their livelihood, but they became so frightened of it that at night they crowded together into a single bedroom. If anyone went to the toilet, a relative would stand guard by the door. The BBC reported comparable events in Khao Lak, where a domestic telephone was ringing 'day and night', making sleep impossible. Whoever answered was greeted by the voices of relatives and friends crying out for someone to rescue them.

The Baan Bang Sak store's business began to fall away. Some of its best customers, workers in the surrounding rubber plantation, fled, saying they could see *phii* (ghosts) walking through the trees. While Buddhist priests conducted ceremonies to calm and release the *phii*, a psychologist, Dr Wanlop Piyamanutham insisted that his countrymen's paranormal experiences were the fruit of inflamed imagination, caused by post-traumatic stress disorder.

Peter Alford concluded his article thus:

On Thursday I asked Am if we could write the story. I expected her to

object. Instead she seemed comforted and pleased: 'So now you believe about the ghosts?'

I said: 'I don't not believe as much as I used to.'

Ghosts of Battle

Strange Saga of the Soldier on the Stairs

The phantom of a mortally wounded Australian Gallipoli veteran is haunting a former British hospital. Far from being frightened by Sergeant Thomas Hunter's spectre, the people of Peterborough, England, have come to regard it as an important, albeit mystical, part of their lives. The council has erected a three-metre-high memorial to the courageous soldier - and war veterans conduct an annual service in his honour: just two of numerous tributes to a spirit that has lingered in the city for 90 years…

THE LETTER, PUBLISHED IN MELBOURNE'S *Herald Sun* on 24 August 2001, was headed Ghost Soldier. Its author, Dorothy Wright, said:

> *My mother, who is 95 and lives in Peterborough, England, thinks that if you publish the details about the ghost of an Australian soldier who haunts the city's museum his soul will be able to rest. I guess that when you're 95 you have such strange thoughts, but maybe it will work. Sgt Thomas Hunter was fighting in the battle of the Somme when he was wounded and shipped across the Channel and taken to Peterborough.*
>
> *He died in an infirmary, which is now the museum, and staff say they have seen his ghost on the staircase near the old operating theatre…My mother has sent me a clipping from the Peterborough newspaper which shows a computer image of the soldier on the stairs and a photo of the more substantial war veterans who gather each year at a ceremony at his graveside…*

Sergeant Thomas Hunter was born in Newcastle. United Kingdom, in 1880. As a young man he immigrated to Australia, where he worked principally as a coalminer in New South Wales. In 1914, at the outbreak of war, he enlisted with the Australian Army and served with the ANZAC force at Gallipoli. He was badly wounded, but survived - to fight in 1916, as a member of 10th Battalion Australian Imperial Force on the Somme. The joint British- French offensive managed to break through German lines, but at immense cost in lives. Hunter was among the gravely injured. A field hospital doctor recommended that he be shipped back to England for specialised care.

Barely conscious, Hunter was transported across the Channel and placed on a hospital train headed north. When his condition worsened the medical supervisor ordered that the train be stopped at the next convenient station - which happened to be Peterborough. From there he was taken to the nearest hospital, the Peterborough Infirmary. But staff could do little for him and the following day - 31 July 1916 - he died. Sergeant Hunter was buried in Broadway cemetery.

But in a sense, he was neither buried nor dead.

The building that would eventually house Peterborough Museum had been erected a century earlier. Initially it served as a grand mansion for local magistrate Thomas Cooke. In 1857, with Cooke long dead, his house was

converted into an infirmary which remained on the site until 1931. The former hospital was then transformed into the city's official museum.

And it was on the Peterborough Museum's premises that the haunting began.

In the museum's early years the trustees could afford only two full-time staff members: a Mr and Mrs Yarrow. The couple, acting as caretakers, lived rent-free with their two sons in an upstairs flat. In September 1931, Mr Yarrow and the children went out for the afternoon, leaving Mrs Yarrow alone in the building. At the end of the working day she saw the remaining visitors out, locked the doors and went up to the flat, to prepare the evening meal.

HAUNTING: Staff spooked by moving furniture and creepy incidents

Spectre hanging around museum could be lonely Anzac

by PETER CRIPPS
NEWS REPORTER

HE'S Australian, he gave his life for King and Country nearly 100 years ago – and now he's stuck in the city's museum thousands of miles away from home.

HE'S BEHIND YOU: Peterborough Museum's events organiser Stuart Orme, some staff have seen the ghostly vision of who they believe is Sgt Thomas Hunter, wh one girl was shoved in the back in a seemingly empty room. (140807/2) Picture: PAUL FR

A spooky spectre – believed to be an Anzac who died in the First World War – is making his presence felt in Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery.

The restless spirit has been frightening visitors and staff at the 184-year-old building in Priestgate.

Several members of staff at the library, which is a former infirmary, have seen the ghostly vision near the old operating theatre on the grand staircase close where creepy 19th century portraits of noblemen hang on the walls.

It appears only as a white blur, chilling the blood of people standing nearby.

Officials at the museum believe the ghost could be Sergeant Thomas Hunter, an Australian soldier who died at the infirmary in 1916.

Sgt Hunter was fighting in The Battle of the Somme before he was injured.

He was shipped across The Channel and put on a train to Leeds, but he was so close to death on the journey that when the train stopped at Peterborough medics rushed him to the infirmary.

It is believed he was only there for a matter of hours before he died.

While he has haunted the building for many years, recently staff claim he has moved furniture in the night and once even shoved someone in the back.

Stuart Orme, the museum's events officer, said: "People think he's the lonely Australian soldier, the Anzac who died here in the First World War.

"We had a girl on work experience here and she was pushed in the back when she was on the ground floor.

"She looked around and there was no one there, but she felt cold.

"I have not seen the ghost myself, but a white figure has been seen for many years on the museum's stairs.

"I have been the last one to leave the building and the first to return the following morning and in the last few weeks I have found chairs have been moved, even though the alarms never went off."

Sgt Hunter is well known to pis in the city.

After his death, a special fu for him was held in Bron Cemetery, and a 10ft monolith erected in his honour.

There is also a plaque in oth him in the Cathedral grounds a was paid for by local people.

Every year city veterans ra her his death at a special cerer

MEMORIAL: War veterans remember Sgt Hunter in a ceremony at his graveside in Broadway Cemetery.

Sharing ghost tale

INSPIRED by the haunting, the museum is now appealing for other people in the Peterborough area to tell them their ghost stories.

It hopes to compile a book of the city's ghosts and is hoping to start a ghost walk similar to those found in other cities such as York and Derby.

The museum's events organiser Stuart Orme said: "We feel Peterborough is worthy of a walk as well.

"The tourist office is flooded with people asking to go on a ghost walk, so we know the demand is there."

Sergeant Thomas Hunter, an ANZAC veteran who died of wounds sustained on the Somme in 1916, still haunts a former hospital, now the city museum, in Peterborough England.

While cooking she heard a noise on the main staircase. Assuming her husband and sons had returned she went out to greet them. But there was no sign of her family. Instead she encountered a young man, climbing the stairs.

For a moment Mrs Yarrow assumed the stranger was a visitor she had locked in by mistake. However she quickly realised something was seriously amiss. The man's footsteps were *'unnaturally loud' - a* physical impossibility as she could now clearly see that he was *floating up the stairs'.*

The man reached the landing where the caretaker's wife stood frozen. Seemingly unaware of her presence, he part- walked, part-wafted to within

inches of her. Then - without opening them - he passed through a pair of doors and floated down the corridor. At the end of the passage he abruptly vanished. Mrs Yarrow fled the building.

Her bizarre sighting became the talk of Peterborough. Who or what had she seen? And why had the apparition chosen that moment to appear? In the years that followed the ghost appeared to numerous other witnesses, usually in the stairwell and on the landing - and analysts began to piece together a rationale. The haunting was principally concentrated in the vicinity of the old operating theatre. The ghost - the consensus had it - was the spirit of the Australian sergeant, Thomas Hunter: the lonely ANZAC who had died in surgery, far from his Australian home and family, in 1916.

All English cities and towns are aswarm with ghosts. But to the people of Peterborough the 'Sergeant Hunter Haunting' has a special poignancy that has resonated through generations. In March 2003, while researching his book on Hunter (*The Lonely Anzac: A True Son of Empire),*local historian John W. Harvey learned how deeply the city's emotions ran. Eric Dent, the museum's heritage manager, rang Harvey to say, 'You'll never guess what I've found.' It was a memorial of carved wood and plaster depicting Sergeant Hunter and surmounted by the Australian coat- of-arms. Somehow it had been mislaid in 1931 when the infirmary became a museum. When a newspaper reported the discovery Peterborough citizens immediately lobbied for the plaque to go back on display.

Earlier, a Celtic cross paid for by public appeal had been placed above Tom Hunter's grave. A memorial in his honour is displayed in Peterborough Cathedral - and on 25 April each year Peterborough, like any Australian town, celebrates Anzac Day.

In 2003 a team from Cambridge University, armed with recorders and motion-sensing cameras, visited the museum to collect data on the phantom, which, after 90 years, is still being blamed for moving furniture and creating cold spots.

One intriguing report centred on a toddler. Museum executive Jo Emmington told me, 'In 2004 a staff member's two-year-old daughter was up in our staff room with her dad while he had lunch. The little girl suddenly asked, *"Does the soldier want a sandwich, Daddy?"* The staff room is directly below the operating theatre where Thomas died.'

My thanks to Peterborough Museum's Stuart Orme and Jo Emmington for their invaluable help with this story. Should any

inaccuracies have been perpetrated, they are mine alone. JP

The Ghost on the River Kwai

Another story of wartime courage - and the haunting that ensued - came to me in 1993 from Bruce McMaugh of Toowoomba, Queensland. He wrote, ‘Last year I went to Thailand for a holiday. While I was there I was astonished to receive three messages which I could only conclude came from an AIF mate who died in 1944.

‘Things started happening shortly after I’d crossed the Bridge on the River Kwai - the structure Allied POWs were forced to build for the Japanese during World War II. Earlier that day I’d been to the Kanchanburi war cemetery where 6900 Allied soldiers are buried. As a tribute I’d placed dried Australian gumleaves on several graves.

‘While I was crossing the bridge I started thinking about four old mates of mine. These were the blokes I’d joined the 2nd AIF with in Townsville more than 50 years before. I couldn’t remember those fellows’ names - and that was ridiculous in the case of one of them, because we’d worked together at the Kalamia sugarmill before joining up.

‘Later, as I sat in my motel unit, I tried hard to remember the name of my friend. Then suddenly my skin started to tingle - and I was aware of someone in the room. I looked around, but there was no one - and I’d heard no footsteps outside. But somebody was in the room all right. I almost jumped out of my skin when a man’s voice, close to my ear, whispered *“Welch!”* That was the name of my friend who’d died. As soon as the name was spoken I could feel that the presence had left the room.

‘Next morning I got up early. I almost ran across the bridge, past the old Japanese steam engine which had pulled munitions and POWs up and down the Burma Railway. When I arrived at the Kanchanburi cemetery no one was about. I opened the container where the register of burials was kept and looked up the name Welch.

‘To my amazement one of my dried gumleaves was acting as a bookmark - on the exact page recording my friend’s funeral.

‘I wrote down the plot, row and grave numbers, realising he was buried in a part of the cemetery I’d never visited before. Finally I found his grave - *on which lay three more of my dried gumleaves, arranged into the shape of the Prince of Wales feathers.* I had never been near that grave before and I couldn’t imagine how the leaves had got there - or why they’d been formed

into the national crest of Wales.

Then I remembered how my friend had loved playing jokes with words. That Welsh insignia was a play on his own name, Welch. I was shaken, but elated. It was wonderful to know that although he'd died in that POW camp, my mate was still alive somewhere, with his sense of humour intact.'

Haunted Hospitals

Dialogue with a Long-Buried Doctor

Appearances by phantom physicians and spectral nurses have been quietly reported over the years by staff at most Australian hospitals. While some health workers are sceptical, others testify that they have seen strange healers visit wards to comfort distressed and dying patients. The 'haunted hospital' syndrome - recognised in every country of the world - has been part of the Australian experience since the days of the first settlers. And sometimes our apparitions have been associated with results that senior doctors simply can't understand…

IT WAS THE MOST MOVING LETTER I have ever received. Dated 11 February 1990 it was sent to me by a young father, Stephen Partington, of Pt Elliott, South Australia. He described a remarkable incident that had occurred nine years earlier when his daughter was a patient in the Adelaide Children's Hospital (now the Women's and Children's Hospital).

'Tarena, my second daughter, had been born with spina bifida and hydrocephalus,' Stephen wrote. 'The ACH's doctors told us she wouldn't live. They warned that even if she did survive she would not have a good life because her brain was saturated with fluid.

'Knowing Tarena had so little time we sat by her bed as often as we could. One morning at about 3.30 she was at her lowest ebb. I was sitting by her cot, trying to comfort her, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned - and saw that a doctor wearing a long white coat was standing by my chair. He told me to stop worrying - saying that Tarena would not only survive, but would be all right.

'With a tremendous surge of relief I turned to look down at her. When I swung back again a couple of seconds later the doctor had vanished. I knew it was utterly impossible for him to have left so silently and swiftly. I rushed out into the corridor but no one was there. Then I went to the staff station, which was only 10 feet from Tarena's ward. When I asked for the name of the doctor I'd just spoken to they gave me puzzled looks. Then they said that no doctor had been on the ward since 9.30 pm, six hours earlier.

'Our daughter did survive, as that doctor predicted. I've often thought since about my encounter with him. And recreating what I saw, I've realised that very little of the man was visible to me. I can't recall seeing a face, hands or even legs. All I remember was a long white coat and his calming voice.'

The ghost of the old Adelaide Children's Hospital is thought by some staff members to be the spirit of a beloved surgeon who died before World War I.

‘I Remember Her Kind Beautiful Face…’

Jo Vale of Blacktown, New South Wales, told me of a meeting with an ethereal nurse who, she believed, saved her life. Jo told me, ‘While I was seriously ill in a Sydney hospital a nurse paid me what I’d later realise was a very strange visit. I was lying, sleepless and in pain, when she walked into my ward. I had no idea she wasn’t an ordinary member of the hospital staff. What I remember most about her now is her kind and most beautiful face.

‘The nurse leaned down and addressed me in a soft voice, saying, “Don’t worry. I’m here now and you’re going to be all right.” That prediction turned out to be dramatically correct. Overnight I made a recovery so complete the doctors couldn’t believe it. Naturally I asked to speak again to the nurse who had cheered me up so much - but the staff were adamant there was no one of that description in the hospital.

‘And that wasn’t the end of it. That afternoon my daughter admitted to me that she’d dreamed she attended my funeral - which was cancelled at the last minute when I was found to be still alive. I’ve wondered ever since who that nurse was, and whether she did indeed restore the gift of life to me.’

Apparitions of the wards - also known as ‘walkers’ - are an international phenomenon, as many Australian travellers can testify. Jacqueline Hearman, a triple- certificated Adelaide nurse, wrote to me to describe the Grey Lady, the ghost of a long-dead nursing sister which for more than a century has appeared to patients in a London hospital. ‘I learned about the ghost while doing my training,’ Jacqueline said. ‘I never actually saw the phantom, but other nurses and patients encountered her frequently. The Grey Lady usually appeared in patients’ rooms about 24 hours before they passed away. She was thought to be the spirit of a ward sister who had died in the late 19th century.

‘The Grey Lady brought comfort to many people. However, the nurses always found it unnerving when an apparently recovering patient asked, “Who was that lady in grey who sat with me?”’

Echoes of the Dying Room

The Old York Hospital in Northam, Western Australia, was closed in 1963 after 67 years in service. The wards, throughout most of their history, were pervaded by phantasms. And after the doors closed for the last time the haunting continued - even spilling over into surrounding premises.

One recipient of the phantoms' attentions was Leigh Carmichael, whose Clifford Street house stood directly in front of the old building. He told *Northam Independent* reporter Ben Robinson (23 September 1997) that hardly a week went by without disturbing phenomena from next door intruding into his rooms. He was more bemused than frightened, until the April night when he and three friends decided to 'go on a tour' of the abandoned hospital.

'From the moment we entered via the top floor my little terrier, who usually bolts ahead, refused to go further,' Leigh recalled. 'We went ahead to the "dying room", with its view of the morgue below. This was the place where terminally ill patients had been kept.

'We got to the staircase landing and both our torches went off. We then heard a door slamming loudly under the stained glass window. *There is no door on that landing.* After that we heard footsteps beneath us, as if someone was walking under the staircase…'

For several years the 'Old York' was used for school camps, producing reports of paranormal events from teachers and students. The most powerful focus of the haunting was believed to be the nearby maternity ward in which many abortions were performed.

Patients Perplexed by

Phantom Phone Calls

During the 1990s something strange began repeatedly to occur in Melbourne's St Vincent's Hospital. Staff and patients received a series of mysterious telephone calls which neither they nor management could explain.

One victim of the phone-bending phenomenon was Mrs M. Miller of Collingwood. 'I was having physiotherapy when my bedside telephone rang,' she told me. 'I picked it up and heard my adult daughter say hello. I explained I was in the middle of physio and said I'd call her back. This annoyed her somewhat. She asked, "What do you mean call back? *You've just rung ME!"*

'She then informed me that she'd been in the kitchen cooking when the sittingroom telephone rang. She picked it up - and there I was. I hung up, absolutely baffled. Then the nursing sister, who'd witnessed the entire incident, astonished me even more. She said these strange phone linkups occurred quite often at St Vincent's. She added that they always happened to people who were close, like husbands and wives or parents and their offspring.

'They'd suddenly find themselves in telephone contact - when neither person had dialled the other.'

A senior executive with the hospital confirmed to me that the phenomenon was real, saying, 'Yes, we have had this odd business with the phones from time to time. A few people on staff believe a ghost's to blame. I'm sure there's a more sensible explanation. The only trouble is, no one's found it.'

Wraith Rattled Nurses

In 1998 security guards rushed to the Royal Melbourne Hospital's plastic surgery department, after three terrified nurses said they had jointly seen a ghost. The guards, suspecting an intruder was the likelier culprit, hoisted a long ladder into the roof. But they could find no sign either of an apparition or an interloper.

Shortly afterward, however, the impossible happened - when a nurse discovered that the ladder had mysteriously been turned upside-down. The hospital's public relations manager was open and helpful: 'For many years staff have been talking about a grey misty figure moving through the building. Some people here believe in the ghost, but others - myself included - think it's no more than a legend that's grown on itself.'

I spoke with several staffers who disagreed. 'She's as real as I am,' a senior nurse assured me. I've seen her twice: once in 1987, when I came across her standing beside an empty bed - and again in 1996 when I saw her floating inside the doorway of a ward. She gave me a bad jolt both times. She was a grey transparent figure in what looked like a nurse's uniform. It occurred to me that I could have passed through her, but I was too scared. I just stood there holding my breath till she vanished.'

The visitant was blamed for several outbreaks of poltergeist activity. On one occasion (1991) staff were shocked to find tables and chairs stacked high in the middle of a conference room that had been locked overnight. But the phantom can also, reportedly, be helpful - occasionally providing glasses of water to patients and even filling their drips.

Some employees believe the entity is the spirit of a student nurse who died in the hospital. Year after year she continues her rounds - perhaps unaware that she is long dead.

- A similarly conscientious 'walker' was Matron Billings, after whom the Adelaide Billings Ward at Brisbane's Royal Children's Hospital was named. The ward has now been demolished - and Matron Billings, her phantasmal habitat destroyed, is no longer seen. But older hospital workers say they can still remember her floating through the building at night, checking on her young patients - stroking foreheads, straightening pillows and tucking in bedclothes.

The Spectre and the Dying Sailor

Ruth S. Taylor was a nurse whose interests might have been expected to lean more toward the medical than the paranormal. But in her autobiography *Baraio* (published 1962) she felt compelled to describe a remarkable experience. Her account reads, in part:

> *This is a tale of something which I saw with my eyes, but which my mind could not explain.*
>
> *The incident happened during my second year (of nurse training at Hobart Hospital) when I was doing my first night-duty in charge of the men's medical floor. Reporting at 9 pm I received my orders from the sister, who finished with, 'Nurse, there is a young Irish sailor in Ward 5. He was brought in today from* HMS Bellerophon *and I fear he may already be beyond human aid. Watch him closely.'*
>
> *I entered Ward 5 at about 9.20, noting that the night- light was very dim. I made my way from bed to bed, speaking to one here and moving another's drink within reach. About halfway along the ward I saw that a beam of clear moonlight was shining on to the bed that I knew must be occupied by the sailor. Then I stopped suddenly, for kneeling beside him was an old lady in black. The boy was still, except for his laboured breathing, and one arm was flung across the white coverlet. In the moonlight I could see it plainly, a study in black and white except for one spot of colour, a red rose in her old-fashioned bonnet.*
>
> *My first thought was, 'Funny, Sister didn't say he had relations here.' I stood a moment watching, and saw that tears were running down the woman's wrinkled cheeks. Here and there a drop turned to silver in the moonlight, though much of her face was in shadow. Her hand was laid on the boy's and both were still except for his breathing.*
>
> *I moved towards them and as I did so was startled to realise that the old lady was fading slowly, and when I came around to where she had knelt, there was no sign of her. The lad's eyes were open and as I laid my fingers on his wrist I asked, 'How are you?' He answered, 'Better, nurse. I've just had a lovely dream about my mother.'*
>
> *Considerably shaken I gave him his drink and treatment and settled him down. He dropped at once into sleep.*
>
> *When at last the day staff came on duty I gave my report to Sister*

and then sought afriend who happened to be working in Ward 5 during the day. Without mentioning what I had seen I asked her to coax the sailor to tell her about a dream he had had during the night, if he were well enough.

That evening she told me that Flynn had had his crisis and was quiet and easy. He had told her he dreamed his mother had kneeled beside him, cried over him and begged him to come home. His description tallied exactly with what I had seen, even to the red rose in her bonnet and the small toilworn hand that had rested on his.

Many times as he grew stronger I encouraged him to talk of his mother and her tiny cottage in the south of Ireland. But I could never bring myself to tell him, or anyone else, of what I had seen. The question to which I should have liked an answer was not - Did I see her? but, Why *did I see her?*

Shadow Children

The Family that Rescued a Little Girl's Ghost

For more years than anyone could accurately remember, the white glowing apparition of a small female troubled a two-storeyed house in the affluent Melbourne suburb of Canterbury. The intruder was so noisy and irritating that the new owners wanted nothing more than to be rid of her. But then the couple began to renovate - and suddenly understood what was bothering their uncanny visitor. With one small act of kindness they solved the girl's problem - and simultaneously banished her from their lives…

THE GRAND VICTORIAN HOUSE stood amid old trees in a quiet street of Canterbury, Melbourne. It had long been known in the area that the spacious rooms and broad rose-trellised gardens were haunted. The phantom took the form of a small girl apparently four or five years old, dressed in shimmering white.

The reports did not deter a company director and his wife from lodging the top bid at auction and moving in with their three children. Everyone in the family adored the house and grounds far too much to be daunted by anything as insubstantial as a phantom. Especially as it was sure to be no more than an optical illusion.

But the entity was real - and after several days spent in its company the parents' patience was exhausted.

Real estate agent David Rafferty, who had sold the property, told me, 'On the very first night - or more accurately in the early morning hours - they started hearing shufflings and tiny childish footsteps: an experience that had also been reported by previous residents.

'The ghost was never threatening - just persistent, which probably explains the legend around the area that it was searching for something. It was certainly noisy. My clients complained that it woke them frequently. But there were never any possums on the prowl - and the children slept through everything.

'Then came the really amazing part. While renovating the owners dismantled an old window seat. Hidden beneath it was a book, *Happy Little Children - Their Sayings and Doings.* On the flyleaf was a faded handwritten note, "To Dear Nellie, with Father's Love. 16/4/1902."

'The owners placed the book prominently on a shelf in the study - and from that day the manifestations ceased.'

The idea that compassion should be shown to certain ghosts (especially those of children) became prevalent in the mid-20th century and persists today. Many clergymen and mediums will try to end a haunting, not by exorcism but by means of a 'rescue seance'. In this ceremony the confused spirit - usually thought to believe it is still alive - is gently told it has died and can now move ahead to the next stage of existence.

Dame Mabel's Encounter -

with a Long-Dead Child

The tireless philanthropist Dame Mabel Brooks, whose music scholarships have enhanced many young Australians' lives, was a woman of firm beliefs. One of her convictions was that ghosts are as natural a part of the weave of our existence as air and water.

Dame Mabel saw a phantom - the apparition of a child - only once. When I was a young broadcaster, compering the radio series *Do You Believe in Ghosts*, she described her experience to me:

> *I was staying as a guest in an old stone-built house at Bacchus Marsh. Late one night I woke up in my bedroom and saw that a young girl - I guessed her age at about 11 - had come into the room. She had her back to me and appeared to be warming her hands at the fire, which was low but still giving out heat.*
>
> *I assumed at first that the child must be a sleepwalker - and spoke very gently to wake her so she wouldn't get a shock. She didn't respond at all, so I decided she must be sleeping really deeply. But when I turned on the bedlamp it was a different story altogether. I could clearly see - quite distinctly see - the decorations on the fireplace* through *her figure. I'd never seen a transparent human being before - but here she was, absolutely no argument, and I was standing beside the bed now, wide awake and in no doubt about what was going on.*
>
> *I knew I was looking at the first human spirit form, or wraith, that I'd ever seen. It was such a moment in my life that I simply stood there staring at that girl and at the fireplace and at the dying embers visible through her.*
>
> *She never walked out of that bedroom. After what was - two minutes, three minutes? - she disappeared. I got back into bed, but of course I couldn't sleep much for the rest of the night. I kept thinking about the girl, trying to call up everything about her that I could remember. Even today I can still summon a picture of how she was dressed. She was in old-fashioned clothes. High collar, white-edged. Long sleeves. Long, very long hair, partly curled.*

The following morning I told our elderly host about what had happened. He said that his older sister had died in that room. She'd been suffering from measles and had fallen out of bed and died on the floor. She was found next morning. Our host believed that it might have been the shock of the way her life ended that was keeping her in the house.

A Tiny Murder Victim ‘Stole Milk’

In 1971 the Catholic Church sent two priests to release a dead child’s spirit from a house in Eight Mile Plains, Queensland. At my request one of the house’s owners, who asked to be identified only as M.C., wrote a chronicle of the extraordinary haunting. It reads, in part:

The house, when we bought it, was two years old. The only people who lived there were myself, my husband Ray and our three-month-old baby Michael. Because I couldn’t breastfeed Michael I gave him bottled milk - and to save every drop for him Ray and I regularly drank our tea black.

One morning I went to the fridge to get the full bottle I’d put there the previous afternoon, and found it was gone. I turned around and saw the precious bottle standing empty on the kitchen table. That was the start of a pattern. Night after night we’d get up to check on strange snufflings and whimperings in adjoining rooms, but no one was ever there. And in the morning we’d find the milk had been drained yet again.

We thought a burglar must be getting in, but wondered why he was interested only in milk, when he could have tried to take money or our TV. I was naturally very scared by all this, and Ray took strong measures to keep the thief out. He sealed all the windows and fixed padlocks to the doors. He also set mousetraps in the passageways. The traps were always sprung next morning, but no mice were ever found.

Finally, hoping to solve the mystery, I started talking to local people. I got a lot of evasion at first (which made it clear they were keeping something from me) but at last I learned the truth. Eighteen months before we’d moved into that house a six-year-old girl had been bashed and murdered in the kitchen. The maniac responsible had put her body in a closet where she had lain undiscovered for 10 days. I was sure the whimpering we’d heard was that poor child crying out for help.

I’d never had dealings with a ghost before, let alone a thirsty one. But the noises and sobbing were distressing us so badly that we finally went to a local priest for advice. He reported the case to his superiors - and a few days later two priests came to the house and conducted a ceremony that seemed to take hours. The exorcism seemed to be a success because the crying and the milk thefts immediately stopped.

I often think of that poor frightened little child and hope she is happy now, wherever she has gone.

Disturbed, by a Drowned Girl's Phantom

Colin Kingdam wrote to me from Willsdale, New South Wales, to say that he too had been impinged upon by a dead child's spirit. 'It happened when a friend, Gary, and I were taking a short holiday at an isolated cottage in Binnaway,' he said. 'I'd never stayed there before but Gary knew the place well. One evening we watched TV for several hours, then decided to get some sleep.

'Before going to bed I visited the outside toilet. While walking back to the house I had the uncomfortable feeling that I was being watched. I can still vividly remember the sensation. I went cold all over and my scalp actually crawled. I assumed right away that we had an intruder - but when I looked around the yard was deserted. I hurried inside and (surprisingly when I think back on it) went straight to sleep.

'Several hours later I was woken by a noise. It was the bedroom doorknob rattling. As the door slowly opened I sat up, pretty scared, to see who it was. For a moment I was relieved, because in the light from the passage I could see it was just a young kid, a girl standing in the doorway. Before I could speak to her she moved away. My scalp started crawling again, but I was also curious - so I got up to look for her. To my puzzlement there was no sign of the child anywhere in the house. My banging and slamming woke Gary, who came out to see what was going on.

'When I told him what I'd seen he was silent for a moment. Then he told me that about 20 years earlier an 11-year-old girl had fallen to her death down a water-filled mineshaft at the rear of the property. I later learned that the girl's ghost had also disturbed other people who stayed in that little house.

'My original reactions of fear, and even revulsion, have long since given way to a profound feeling of pity for that unfortunate girl.'

Animal Entities

The Cats and Dogs that ‘Came Back’

‘The world of the living,’ opined essayist Thomas de Quincey, ‘is a tiny garrison, under constant attack from the countless legions of the dead.’ And as numerous witnesses Australia-wide have testified, not all of those visitants are human…

THE DEATH OF A PET CAN LEAVE an aching emptiness in the house. To open the front door onto silence, when you had absentmindedly expected to be greeted by an excited terrier or an importuning cat, can be a wrenching experience.

But according to many owners with whom I have spoken and corresponded, an animal's death is not necessarily the end. Lorna Davis of Maroubra, New South Wales, wrote:

> *Our much-loved Burmese, Mitzi, died of extreme old age in 1982. The children found her one afternoon, stretched out peacefully in her basket - and we buried her with much emotion in the back garden.*
>
> *As she'd grown older, Mitzi had fallen into the habit of sleeping on our double bed. We always left the bedroom window open so she could come and go as she pleased.*
>
> *One night, about three weeks after we lost her, I got a real shock. I was lying wide awake, worrying over a problem at work, when I felt something very familiar - a cat leaping up and nestling at my feet. I immediately assumed that a neighbour's cat had entered through our window - but when I looked both the bedroom door and the window were closed.*
>
> *And although I could feel the weight quite unmistakably, no cat was visible. It was then (feeling rather foolish) that I whispered the question, 'Mitzi?' - and was answered by a familiar purring. I had two more of these visits. They convinced me that Mitzi's ghost had somehow returned to comfort us. My husband was asleep during the first incident and simply laughed when I told him next morning. But on the next two occasions he was awake, too. The evidence seems to indicate that our cat came back from the dead.*

The files of psychical research societies are filled with case histories of animals which allegedly haunted their owners. Bill Courtney of Sarina, Queensland, was in no doubt that the syndrome is real:

> *Some years back I owned a greyhound bitch of which I was very fond. When we left the country to live in town she became ill and showed all the symptoms of pneumonia. By tempting her with healthy food and spooning milk down her throat I pulled her through the crisis.*

But she never really recovered, and after a while began having fits. I was so distressed by her suffering that I thought it kindest to have her put down. The night after she died I was lying awake, grieving, in the sleepout we used to share. My greyhound had been in the habit of staying outside until about 10 o'clock, then coming in to sleep beside me.

At about 10 pm I heard pattering footsteps come up the front steps, along the verandah, and to my bedside. Then I heard something sink to the floor. I looked, but there was nothing to be seen. Nor was there anything moving in the yard outside, which was brightly lit by streetlamps and the moon.

I was certain that my dear dog had returned, as if to show me I needn't be sad; and that she was all right, even though we were separated. I stopped worrying and she never came again.

During a visit to the Victorian town of Baxter, I heard a similar story from a local couple, Charles and Maureen Wort. 'We're down-to-earth people,' Maureen said. 'But we'll both swear that our cat Ginger seems to have survived death. About 12 weeks after he died we both distinctly heard and felt him lying on our bed, purring.'

Another correspondent convinced that animals have an afterlife was Mrs J. Zwarycz of Broomfield, Victoria:

For my sixteenth birthday my Dad bought me a beautiful Alsatian puppy. My new friend, whom I named Rex, was small and not very active - but I'd chosen him from the litter because I believed he needed a home more than the others. For four days we all loved and cared for him - but then, despite the attentions of a vet, he died. The whole family was upset.

Several weeks later I was lying in bed wide awake when I heard a whimper. Looking toward the door I saw Rex sitting watching me. *My mother tried to convince me that I was imagining it all - but I trusted the evidence of my own senses and was in no doubt that Rex had returned.*

Some years later, when I married, I had another encounter with a ghostly animal - this time, a cat. My husband and I had just moved into an old house with our two-year-old son. On the second day in our new home, the baby was taking a nap and I was washing up in the kitchen when a huge black cat came up to me, rubbing against my legs. I bent

down to stroke him - and discovered to my astonishment that he simply wasn't there!

Next day I met my neighbour for the first time. I asked her if she had a black cat. She replied, 'No, but the old lady who lived in your house had one. After she passed away her pet pined and refused to eat. When the poor cat died the old lady's son buried him in the back garden.'

British university groups conducting research into NDEs (near-death experiences) have collected interesting anecdotal data involving animals. A percentage of patients revived from clinical death recalled 'passing through a light', then being greeted, in an idyllic environment, by all the pets they had nurtured since childhood.

Troubled Timepieces

Clock Fell Silent, When its Builder was Buried

On a February afternoon in 1982 the immense four-dialled clock above Brisbane's City Hall failed to chime. It was the first time in 53 years that the famous clock - then Australia's largest - had malfunctioned. By an exceedingly strange coincidence the machinery failed at the precise time the clock's designer and builder, 93-year-old Arthur Appleton Jackson, was being lowered into his grave. This was not the first occasion in Australia upon which a clock had broken down when its maker or owner died…

My grandfather's clock
Was too large for the shelf,
So it stood 90 years on the floor.
It was taller by half
Than the old man himself,
Though it weighed not a pennyweight more.
It was bought on the morn
Of the day that he was born,
And was always his treasure and pride;
But it stopped short,
Never to go again,
When the old man died.

Lyrics C. Russell Christian.
Music Henry Clay Work, 1875

IN 1926 BRISBANE'S MAYOR and councillors voted to build a grand clock to surmount the City Hall. The firm they chose for the job was the Synchronome Electrical Company, managed by 37-year-old Arthur Appleton Jackson - member of a respected clock-building dynasty. It was the most ambitious project Jackson or anyone else in his family had handled.

For three years Jackson devoted most of his waking hours to the design and construction of his cherished timepiece - supervising every detail from the shaping of the sheet-copper hands on the four dials to the placement of a tonne of white opal in the opulent framework.

In 1929, just as the Great Depression was beginning, the fully automatic clock was activated. Set in a tower 55 metres from the ground, with a striking and chiming mechanism 15 metres higher, it was the pride of Brisbane. By 1931 it had set a world record by losing only five seconds in two years. It continued to keep virtually perfect time through the economic crisis, World War II and the long uneasy peace thereafter.

But then, on a cloudless summer afternoon in February 1982, an unprecedented event occurred. Workers in the City Hall and hundreds of passers-by became aware that something was amiss in the works of the clock far above them. For the first time in more than half a century it had failed to chime the hour.

The mechanism broke down at the precise time the clock's builder, Arthur Appleton Jackson, was being buried.

'I feel that the works went wrong in sympathy with Dad,' Arthur's son and successor Bill Jackson told me. 'There seems to be no other explanation. When we checked the chiming system we found a mechanical fault, of course. But it's a million-to-one coincidence that it should happen at precisely the moment of Dad's burial.'

City Hall staff agreed. 'I've been with the council for 30 years and have never bothered with a watch,' one worker told Brisbane's *Courier Mail.* 'You could always rely on Old Faithful to chime on time.'

The Brisbane incident exemplified a phenomenon that has been internationally recognised for as long as clocks have existed. Dr J.B. Rhine, who headed the parapsychology department at Duke University, USA, investigated numerous timepieces whose mechanical lives had ended with their owners' deaths. He cited the case of a 39-year- old Oregon man who

died of a heart attack while reading in his sittingroom. The mantel clock and his wristwatch both stopped at 11.14. Rhine offered no theory to explain the data he had collected. But the French parapsychologist Robert Charroux was bolder - proposing that death may in some cases create a ‘force-field’ which can affect machinery.

Perhaps the most celebrated example of a ‘clock- stopping death’ occurred at the end of Queen Victoria’s reign. Official records show that Victoria died at 6.25 pm on 22 January 1901 at her winter home on the Isle of Wight. On the day of her funeral the clock in the tower at Balmoral stopped at 6.25. The periodical *Notes and Queries* quoted a Constable Reed as saying that ‘the clock had not been stopped by any human hand’. But the magazine pointed out that ‘it was the snow that did it. A crescent-shaped wreath of snow had gathered on the lower part of the dial, arresting the hour hand at VI and the minute hand at V…the exact time of Her Majesty’s death.’

Anniversary Apparitions

Sightings of ‘time-sensitive’ ghosts - entities which appear on a date that was significant to them in life - have been described to me by several witnesses.

- Mrs Phoebe Betteridge of Balwyn, Victoria, recalled: ‘At the time my father was dying of liver cancer we were living far away from him, at a farm near Geelong. One morning I glanced across the room and saw him, as plainly as if he was really there. The expression on his face was heartbreakingly sad. He then vanished and I felt like crying, because I knew he was dead. It was then, for some reason, that I looked at my watch. It was 11 am on November 11. When my sister rang half an hour later she confirmed that like the good old soldier he was, my dad had died at exactly that time - on Armistice Day.’

- From Leigh Creek, South Australia, Chris Chase wrote: ‘My father was working overseas in Adelaide House, next to London Bridge. One night he caught sight of a smartly dressed man wearing a bowler hat walking toward the building’s edge. Dad called out, but the man didn’t stop. With horror my father realised that if the man kept walking he’d go over the edge - and that’s what happened. He watched helplessly as the man fell. But when the plummeting body was midway between the roof and the wharf below, it vanished. Next day Dad learned that a businessman had suicided from that spot one year before.

- The home of a woman living in Maryborough, Victoria, was disrupted by bizarre electrical breakdowns shortly after her husband died. Mrs W.S. wrote: ‘Soon after my husband was killed in a car accident everything started happening at once. Three globes and an outside light suddenly blew…a fluorescent tube shattered…a bar in a heater broke…a lightswitch fused…and a stove burner coil blew out. The batteries in a torch, fresh the day before, went flat suddenly, and my electric clock stopped. I had no more electrical trouble until 12 months later: the anniversary of my husband’s death. On that day it all happened again. The light globes in three rooms failed, a heater element fused, my torch and clock batteries went flat, and a headlight globe on my new car blew

out. I cannot put all these failures down to coincidence. I am convinced that my husband was somehow communicating with me.'

- Melina Walsh of Rockdale, New South Wales, said: '…I was renting a flat above a shop. One bitterly cold night around 8.30, the atmosphere in my bedroom suddenly started to warm up, for no apparent reason. After a while it was so hot I had to open the window. The sense of stifling heat lasted for about 10 minutes. When I told my landlady she was unsurprised. She told me that the old lady who owned the shop had died in that bedroom at around 8.30 pm on August 11 - the same time and date I'd felt that blast of heat.'

Cedar Clock ‘Sent a Message’

The Adelaide radio announcer Judith Barr also experienced an uncanny brush with a clock. In 1983, during the period that she was compering the afternoon program at 5DN, she told me, ‘It all began when my engineer uncle Bill, to whom I was very close, died at his home in Suffolk. The family were mildly surprised by the fact that his favourite cedar clock stopped on the day he passed on. The clock resisted all efforts to restart it.

‘Four years later I went home on a visit. To everyone’s amazement the clock spontaneously began ticking and chiming - within a few hours of me walking in the front door.

‘When I left the clock stopped again. Maybe it was all a coincidence. But I’ve often wondered whether Bill was using that clock to send me a farewell message.’

The Chimes that Annoyed a Ghost

A noise-sensitive spirit that apparently tampered with a mantel clock's mechanism was described to me by a Queensland correspondent, Betty McGill of Everton Park. She wrote:

When he retired my father was presented with a chiming mantel clock. Dad hated that timepiece. It ticked too loudly and he'd often complain that its Westminster chimes drove him crazy. So he ensured that it stood silent for 30 years - until he died in a bedroom of our family home.

I inherited the clock and because, unlike Dad, I was rather fond of it I got it going again and placed it on a bookcase in the hall. Sitting in that position it ticked and chimed continuously. Then my mother died and I set to work reorganising the house. I converted my dad's former bedroom into a lounge and it seemed the natural thing to put the clock in there.

But as soon as I moved it from the hallway into what had been Dad's room, it stopped working. I tried returning it to the hall bookcase and it started again, ticking and chiming quite reliably. After several further attempts to keep the clock going in the old bedroom I asked my brother to check that it was correctly balanced. He confirmed that it was - and admitted that he was baffled.

That wasn't the only strange occurrence in my father's old room. Whenever I put the clock in there, a china cabinet would start to shake and rattle. I finally admitted to myself that Dad was still very much present and was telling me to keep that detested clock elsewhere. One day I overcame my misgivings and tried to talk to him. I stood in his old room and said, 'Cool it, Dad - I'll keep the clock on the bookcase from now on.' After that we had no problems with the clock, but my father remained in the house for a while. One day, while making my son's bed, I heard footsteps in the passage. I saw, near the bookcase, a grey ghostly outline which I knew to be my father. As I stood watching him he faded to nothingness.

Clock Stopped at Instant of Death

An incident involving an ornate wall clock, which broke down at the moment its owner died, was described to me by Wayne Iles of Woy Woy, New South Wales.

In 1977 my sister and I were devastated when our beloved grandfather died from a brain tumour. One circumstance of his death was extremely unusual. Family members who'd been sitting with him were astonished to notice that his favourite, very elaborate wall clock, which he'd wound every day, stopped at the moment he drew his last breath.

But that wasn't the only extraordinary event. After the funeral the family, including my sister and I, went back to Grandma's house to stay overnight. I lay awake for a long time, feeling very sad and distressed, because my grandfather had been a good friend. When I finally fell asleep I dreamed I'd walked into the kitchen. I was shocked to see my grandfather there, alive again, sitting at the table. I turned to run, but he told me not to be frightened - he'd only come back to show me he was all right.

This reassured me - and I gave him a big hug. Next morning I woke feeling strangely calm. I knew that my grandfather was happy and safe. I kept this dream secret for five years. But one afternoon, when my sister and I were having a long talk about the family, I told her about my meeting in the kitchen, which by that time I'd convinced myself was no more than a fantasy.

My sister just sat staring at me. Then she said, 'I had exactly the same dream on the night of the funeral.' The knowledge that we'd shared this experience had a major effect on both of us. We began to believe, without a shadow of doubt, that life continues after death.

Another grandparent's demise - that coincided with a multiple stoppage of clocks - was described to me by Keith Humphrey of Warrandyte, Victoria. 'My grandmother, who was only 69, suddenly collapsed and died during a family afternoon tea at her unit in Brighton,' he said.

'It wasn't until a couple of hours later that we saw to our amazement that every clock in the unit - and one watch - had stopped at the moment of Grandma's death.'

Untimely Hauntings

- During the 1950s a noisy entity, which seemed aware of daylight saving time, disturbed an abandoned cottage at Toolong, near Port Fairy, Victoria. At six o'clock every evening the sound of a small bell would echo within the building. Visitors who went inside to investigate could never find a person - or a bell - on the premises. Locals surmised that the bell might have been rung by an invalid who died waiting for help. In 1963, when daylight saving was introduced, the bell continued to ring. But now it was heard every evening at seven o'clock.
- Sydney's Prince Henry Hospital was reputedly frequented by the shadowy figure of a matron who died when she fell down a disused liftwell (see also *Haunted Hospitals*, page 291.) Whenever the apparition appeared in a particular ward its clocks (and sometimes patients' and nurses' watches) ceased to function.
- A poltergeist, which wrought havoc in a house in aptly named Mortdale, New South Wales, showed particular interest in a newly purchased clock. Mrs Sue Wilson of Claymore, New South Wales, recalled, 'My husband brought the clock home and placed it on the TV set. For reasons we could never guess at it immediately became the focus of unpleasant events. While my sister-in-law was watching a program the clock suddenly flew across the room, cracking its glass dome. A few days later we heard a crash in the lounge. We ran in and found the clock on the far side of the room. It never worked again. Nor did any other clocks we introduced into the house…We finally decided to pack up and leave.'
- A suicide victim's ghost was believed to be haunting a Queensland civic centre. Visitors to the clock tower above the South Brisbane town hall reported sensing a powerful and menacing presence. The phantom was most frequently seen near the top of the 90 steps leading up to the clock's massive works.

John Jackson, son of clock-builder Arthur Appleton Jackson, wound the clock for 52 years and described the tower apparition as 'extremely frightening'. He told me, 'Often I had to work in the tower late at night. Even

when the air was still I’d suddenly feel a freezing gust of air which covered me with goosepimples.’ Some visitors to the town hall claim to have seen the phantom - the image of a young man - drifting above the steps. The apparition was commonly believed to have been the spirit of a young soldier who returned from the war in 1918 - and shot himself when his fiancee rejected him.

Churchmen's Ghosts

Minister Haunted Vicarage for 50 Years

Reverend John Blennerhassett was one of the most popular ministers ever to serve in the Anglican Christ Church at Birregurra, in the foothills of Victoria's Otway Ranges. When he died of a diabetes-linked illness in 1956, old friends said they would miss his kindness and good humour. Their regrets were premature. Reverend John would not be leaving the world for quite a while…

AFTER RETIRING FROM THEIR FARM IN 1969, David and Julie Flavel decided to rent while they sought a house of their own. The two-storey vicarage next door to Birregurra's Anglican Christ Church was available. They moved in.

'Strange things started happening almost from the first day,' Julie, in her 90s, recalled. 'In the evenings, when David and I were relaxing in the sittingroom we'd often hear heavy footsteps going up the stairs. It sounded as though somebody was carrying something heavy - and the footsteps always stopped at the bedroom door. One night I looked up the stairs and saw a dark shadow on the landing. At first I thought it was my husband carrying firewood up to the bedroom but he was still downstairs. Later I heard from friends at the golf club that the previous tenants had heard those footsteps too.'

The Flavels were assailed by many other sounds, ranging from what they took to be a windup gramophone playing songs of the 1930s to the voices of women laughing and walking around the kitchen in high heels.

'I didn't take much convincing that we had ghosts,' Julie recalled. 'I knew that at least one of them was a man, because of those heavy footsteps. I felt it was someone who was mirroring the action of carrying firewood upstairs, in the same way my husband and I did. Not only did I feel no fear, but I knew instinctively that this male person was benign…and on one occasion he and his companions possibly prevented a disaster.

'I was fast asleep when I was woken by voices in the front room. I went down to investigate, but no one was there. What I did see, though, was that a log had fallen from the fireplace. It was smouldering on the carpet - and I realised that if I hadn't got up the room would have been on fire. I believe those voices warned me.'

Julie Flavel had her strangest experience in 1970, shortly before Christ Church celebrated its centenary: 'It was a hot day and when I got home from golf I decided to take a nap in a chair in the upstairs bedroom. I'd half dozed off when I was woken by someone in the room. It was a woman, arranging flowers on a small table. It gave me a start - and the woman apologised, saying, "The vicarage is so old I didn't think anyone lived here any more."

By that evening, Julie had put the incident aside, confident she had dreamed it. But she received a shock on the day of the centenary, when

dozens of former residents visited Birregurra for Christ Church's celebrations.

Among them was the woman who had startled her in the bedroom.

'She introduced herself with what sounded like a hyphenated surname,' Julie recalled. 'We talked and she said she'd come to the parish as a bride - and that those had been her happiest days. She also told me that she and her husband used the upstairs bedroom as their parlour - and that he'd complained about having to carry the wood upstairs every night.

BIRREGURRA'S HAUNTING MYSTERY

Minister the likely ghost

by Julie Holbery

IN the history of Christ Church at Birregurra the only name which sounded hyphenated, as described by former vicarage resident Julie Flavel, was Rev John Ponsonby Blennerhassett, who was at the church from 1930-36.

In local folklore, the minister appears to be the most likely ghostly resident of the vicarage.

There are 16 Blennerhassett families in Australia. They all came from a town called Blennerhassett in northern England near the Scottish border.

Two Blennerhassetts were members of the clergy. One was the Archbishop at the Bendigo Cathedral and the other was Rev John Ponsonby Blennerhassett.

Discussions with Mrs Judith Barclay (nee Blennerhassett) who lives in north-western Victoria, reveals that it was her mother who went back to Birregurra for the centenary celebrations in 1978, reinforcing Julie Flavel's account of her vision and later meeting at the centenary celebrations.

The Rev John Blennerhassett arrived from Murton with his new wife in 1930 and their first child Judith was born in Birregurra.

Rev Blennerhassett left Birregurra in 1936 and went to the vicarage in Port Fairy but suffered from diabetes for many years prior to his death.

Birregurra resident Miss Beat North remembers going to the vicarage for tea as a young girl and watching Rev Blennerhassett eating fruit and nuts to control his diabetes.

Miss North also remembers having to keep another minister's wife company because she was too scared to stay in the vicarage by herself.

After Rev Blennerhassett died Mrs Blennerhassett married Rev Goodisson and she now lives in Melbourne.

Mrs Goodisson remembers attending the centenary celebrations in 1970 but said she had no strange experiences at the vicarage.

Winchelsea Hostel resident Mrs Helen Banfield remembers having deep discussions about religion and life with Rev Blennerhassett when she was a young girl at Murton in the 1920s.

She saw him as a good man and felt he was an admirable godfather for her daughter Fran.

Judith Barclay, Rev Blennerhassett's daughter, also remembers her father as a serious but concerned person who gave time to other people's problems.

Remembering ... Mrs Helen Banfield has fond memories of Rev Blennerhassett.

Picture: GLENN FERGUSON

In 1996, after a long investigation, journalist Julie Holbery tentatively identified the ghost haunting the Christ Church vicarage in Birregurra Victoria. From the *Bellarine Echo.*

‘Later I tried to work out how she could possibly have made that appearance in the bedroom. The only explanation I could think of was that she’d received the centenary invitation and started thinking about the vicarage where she’d lived - then spoke to me in some kind of telepathic dream.’

In 1996 local journalist Julie Holbery produced a series of articles about the haunted vicarage for the *Bellarine Echo.* She identified the probable, principal ghost as a minister who had died four decades earlier:

> *Research shows that Rev. John Blennerhassett came to the vicarage in 1930 with his new wife Gwen. This was apparently the happiest time of their lives, before Rev. Blennerhassett suffered deteriorating health from diabetes until his death in 1956.*
>
> *…In local folklore the minister appears to be the most likely ghostly resident of the vicarage. Mrs Judith Barclay (nee Blennerhassett) reveals that it was her mother who went back to Birregurra for the centenary celebrations in 1970, reinforcing Julie Flavel’s account of her vision and of the later meeting at the celebrations.*

The old vicarage is now owned by retired graphic designer Frank Wood and his wife Ann. In July 2005 Frank told me, ‘If the ghost’s still here it hasn’t troubled us much. I can only recall one incident which seemed a bit strange. Once, after coming home I walked into a room and found the armchair rocking. I thought one of our cats might have jumped off the chair - but they refused to return to that room for the rest of the night.’

Builder Bob Dorrell and electrician Ron Hayward, who renovated for the Woods, had odder experiences. ‘I’d put a tool down and return to get it later and it would be gone,’ Ron said. ‘A can of Coca-Cola, which my wife had left on the bottom stair before we went out, had somehow migrated to the top of the landing when we returned. That happened twice - both times with nobody in the house.’

Reverend John Blennerhassett and his bride Gwen Moore, pictured on their wedding day, moved to the Birregurra vicarage in 1930. After the clergyman's death in 1956, it became the hub of a haunting.

While measuring a rear room's windows for flyscreens, Bob Dorrell wrote notes on a sheet of paper and placed it on the bed. When he turned back from the window the paper was gone. He walked downstairs to get replacement paper, only to find the original sheet lying on the grass beside his car. After he returned to the bedroom the door slammed behind him.

Bob said, 'There was no wind and I'd been at the back of the vicarage. The car was parked at the front. How a sheet of paper could have made that journey without human help I can't imagine. But I do know I wouldn't go in there on my own again.'

Earwitness Report from a

Ghost-Ridden Rectory

For the first half of the 20th century St Matthew's Rectory in Windsor, New South Wales, notoriously teemed with phantoms. Reverend Norman Jenkyn lived in the old building for 30 disturbing years. In retirement he described his experiences - slightly abridged here - for the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* (3 March 1939):

> *…The old and historic Rectory of St Matthew's stood in the shade of a widespreading Japanese elm and huge kurrajong trees.*
>
> *When I took charge of the parish a few residents informed me that the Rectory was haunted. I was not perturbed by their statements (and) took up residence in the old house. I had not long to wait for the ghostly visit. One night at about 12.30, while lying in bed upstairs, I heard distinctly the drawer of the sideboard in the dining room below open, and then what seemed to me like the turning over of forks and spoons as if someone was searching for a particular one. I was alone in the house. I hastily dressed and in the dark crept stealthily down the long circular stairway leading to the dining room. I turned the torch on, but found no one.*
>
> *Some four weeks later my housekeeper awoke at about one am and heard similar sounds and thinking that I was searching for a knife, called out,* 'You will find the cake knife in the right-hand drawer, Sir.' *She mentioned the incident to me the next morning (but) I was afraid to tell her (the truth). Had I informed her, she would have packed up and left without a day's notice.*
>
> *My sister came to stay with me, but after one night's experience she decided to return to Sydney by the first train. She has not since been within five miles of the old building.*
>
> *I employed a Japanese groom and cook. In the winter evenings after church he sat in the dining room before the fire. One evening, at about 11.30, he turned and said,* 'What's that, Boss?' *I drew my breath and listened and quite distinctly we heard the strange sound of someone walking along the stone-flagged passageway at the back of the hall, and*

placing bricks in position. This went on for 20 minutes, after which we decided to investigate. We walked quickly into the dark passage, but again, no one was to be seen. Needless to say my groom gave me notice the following morning. After he left I still heard the strange sounds, but comforted myself with the thought, 'They are only ghosts.'

On another occasion a strange incident occurred. I awoke between one and two o'clock and was alarmed at the sound of footsteps on the stairway leading from the hall below to my room upstairs. Knowing that there was no one else in the house I determined to wait until the intruder had reached the top step. Slowly, very slowly, he made the ascent, and stood at last on the landing. I rushed out, timid but determined to see it through, but alas saw nothing. 'Ghosts, I suppose,' *I remarked, and went back to bed.*

One more incident will help to show how true it was that the Rectory was haunted. On one occasion I went to spend the evening with friends. I locked the old house securely, but found on my return that the front doors were standing widely open. No other door had been tampered with and nothing else was disturbed. This happened time after time.

Norman Jenkyn concludes:

So I became accustomed to ghosts after 30 years' contact, and today I regard them as great company. I am convinced that ghosts, an unseen cloud of witnesses, play an important part in the life of mankind.